Machiavelli's Aesthetic Advice: Visual *Arte* and the Political Sublime in *The Prince*

Ulysses Fiorito

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By: Ulysses Fiorito

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Signed by the final Examining Committee:

_____ Chair
Dr. Daniel Salée

_____ Second reader
Dr. Travis Smith

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Ed King

Approved by _____
Dr. Daniel Salée - Graduate Program Director

_____2020 _____
Dr. Pascale Sicotte - Dean of Faculty

ABSTRACT

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Ulysses Fiorito

Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* with a keen eye for the realities of politics and would not have ignored an aspect as politically relevant as art. The visual arts were pervasive at all levels of state and society in 15th-16th century Florence. The Medici family's conscious use of art as a means of securing political legitimacy and glory, along with Machiavelli's involvement in the commissioning of Leonardo and Michelangelo's *Battle* frescoes for the Florentine Republic, should lead one to consider the inclusion of advice on the use of visual art for political ends in *The Prince*. It is in the rhetorically distinct aesthetic representation of Remirro de Orco's severed corpse in Chapter VII that one finds Machiavelli's suggestion that a worthy prince must not only imitate Cesare's violent and cunning *virtù* to craft an act of the political sublime, but also adopt his use of a visual effect for political legitimacy. Chapter XVIII further elaborates on this point through its emphasis on the appearances a prince can cunningly craft with the aid of artists and their *arte* so as to gain favor from the people and deceive political rivals - a point exemplified through Machiavelli's use of Leon Battista Alberti's language describing the visual arts. In both instances, a form of political legitimacy is attained through a visual effect inspired by a religious aesthetic. *Arte*, in these instances, goes beyond being a metaphor for statecraft, and becomes an actual strategic tool for governance in Machiavelli's text.

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Introduction

It might seem unusual to read Machiavelli as an advisor to or advocate of the fine arts, as it initially appears to run contrary to most of his advice concerning statecraft. For instance, Machiavelli himself writes that "a prince should have no other object, nor any other thought, nor take anything else as his art but that of war and its orders and discipline; for that is the only art which is of concern to one who commands" (*The Prince* 58). The insistence on the use of a citizen militia over mercenaries, the necessity for "cruelty well used", and the trumpeting of the "effectual truth" over the imagination suggests that there would be no relevance for visual art in Machiavelli's *Prince*. Renaissance art, steeped in imagination, emotion, and beauty, might seem distant from Machiavellian *virtù* and the realities of politics. On the contrary, the pervasiveness of visual art in 15th-16th century Florence at all levels of state and society, along with the history of the Medici's patronage and Machiavelli's involvement in the commissioning of the *Battle* frescoes for the Great Council Hall during Soderini's Republic (1502-1512), should lead one to reconsider Machiavelli's relationship with visual art. It should also lead one to reconsider much of Machiavellian scholarship's understanding of the close ties between political actors and the arts in Renaissance Italy.

A spectacle-oriented approach to reading Machiavelli is the closest scholarship has to examining the role of the visual arts in his works. Rebhorn (*Foxes and Lions*) and Hochner (*A Ritualist Approach to Machiavelli*) consider the effects of the spectacle of political theatre and of violent ceremonial rituals on the development and renewal of the *patria*, respectively. However, the general lack of consideration of Machiavelli's references to the political utility of art has left a lacuna in what I consider to be a subtle, yet significant lesson in Chapter VII and XVIII of *The Prince* - the artistic appreciation Machiavelli deems necessary in a prince. It is in the rhetorically distinct aesthetic representation of Remirro de Orco's severed corpse that one finds Machiavelli's suggestion that a worthy prince must not only imitate Cesare's violent and cunning *virtù* to craft an act of the political sublime, but also adopt his use of a visual effect for political legitimacy. King defines the political sublime as the "response [terror and satisfaction] to the aesthetic effects of violence, committed in the course of political ends" (*Quinquennial Terror* 70). Although the term itself does not appear in Machiavelli's works, King shows that an understanding of its effects and utility is present in the references to Cesare Borgia's methods of *crudeltà* (70). Chapter XVIII further elaborates on this point through its emphasis on the

appearances a prince can cunningly craft with the aid of artists and their *arte* so as to gain favor from the people and deceive political rivals. In both instances, a form of political legitimacy is attained through a visual effect inspired by a religious aesthetic. This thesis will show that, in *The Prince,* Machiavelli expresses (occasionally and where most relevant) a view of visual art as a vehicle for the political sublime that, if properly employed, can help bring glory, legitimacy and longevity to Florence in times of political tumult. Furthermore, it will consider how this view of art affects one's reading of Machiavelli's teaching on the role of the imagination in his effectual truth of politics. Machiavelli ascribes to Borgia the exemplary trait of the statesman who is able to use the political sublime in laying his foundations to secure the fear and awe of the people, and the glory of the *patria.* A violent spectacle can lead a ruler to apotheosis in the eyes of his citizens*,* and the public display of an artwork capturing the sublime moment in a single frame can maintain the institutional memory of this power and glory once that ruler is gone. A close reading of chapters VII and XVIII suggests that Machiavelli wrote in adherence to this belief. Art, in these instances, goes beyond being a metaphor for statecraft, as Pitkin suggests it is, and becomes an actual strategic tool for governance in Machiavelli's text (54).

To support this claim, I first present historical evidence relating to the Medici's use of art, and Machiavelli's ties to political art commissions under Soderini's republic. It is crucial to understand the Medici's relation to art throughout their reign, as well as Machiavelli's awareness of it, because it enforces the claim that Machiavelli actively sought to advise them on how to successfully make political use of art in the passage on Borgia and Orco. His understanding of the role of Florentine art and its political implications is never blatantly stated in his works but is, as I argue, intentionally implied. There is evidence beyond a purely textual analysis that strengthens this claim. The Medici, as patrons of art (as well as the Republic under Soderini), were aware of its capacity to "[elaborate] the public face of government" (Bullard 345). Lorenzo the Magnificent utilized art in a way that culturally and politically elevated both Florence and his own esteem, particularly in his commissioning of artworks by Botticelli and Michelangelo which had the effect of promoting Florence as the "supreme center of Renaissance culture" (Strathern, *The Medici* 186). Leo X, the Medici pope in power at the time *The Prince* was written, was "one of the greatest patrons amongst the Renaissance popes" (277). The Medici used the display of art to intimidate, inform, flatter, provoke, inspire and establish themselves as the rightful heirs to Florence's political levers (Lee 153; Solum 9). Since the Medici family served as the targeted

readers of Machiavelli's *Prince*, it is not unlikely that Machiavelli used a rhetoric of art to appeal to an aspect of Florentine life they knew well (King, *Rolling a Stone for the Medici* 46). Furthermore, having been involved in the commissioning of the *Battle of Anghiari* and *Battle of Cascina* frescos (1504-5), Machiavelli was no stranger to the possibilities of art as an aspect of political statecraft. Given to Leonardo Da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarotti, respectively, to paint within the Great Council Hall of Florence, the frescoes were meant to "erase the bitter popular memory of" Savonarola's death and reignite his "spiritual vision" in a secular context through the "portrayal of a heavenly helper in the sky cheering on the Florentine army" (Jones 54). There was thus political intent behind the commission of the sublime artworks. This intent, along with Machiavelli's role in the commissioning of the *Battle* frescoes with Soderini, will be considered in situating Machiavelli within the republic's immediate artistic context.

In Chapter 2, I move from a historical to a textual analysis of Machiavelli's understanding of the political function of visual *arte*. I consider the meaning of the word "*arte"* in 15th-16th century Florence and show how Machiavelli's own use of the term in *The Prince* suggests an understanding of art articulated in the theoretical writings of Leon Battista Alberti; that being the *arte moderna* of painting, sculpture, and architecture (Nethersole, *Art of Renaissance Florence* 49). Although Georgio Vasari is often cited as the *auctoritas* on Italian Renaissance Art, his *Lives of the Artists* was published in 1550, decades after Machiavelli's death. I opt to focus primarily on the writings of Alberti as they predate Machiavelli's writing of *The Prince* (mid to late 15th century) and are therefore likely to have informed the work. Important to note is that Alberti never makes an explicit case for art as a tool for political legitimization. Machiavelli's argument is a unique contribution to the writings on the Florentine art and artists of his day. It also coincides with his practical approach to politics, evidenced through his push for the "effectual truth", and his tendency to provide his own spin on traditional humanist writings such as his inversion of Cicero's lesson of the lion and fox metaphor in *On Duties,* where Cicero likens "force and fraud" to bestial vices "suited to the lion and the fox but not to human beings" (Carty 122). Just as Machiavelli adapts the concept of *virtù* to his own ideas about statecraft, he adapts *arte.* Through an examination of the rhetoric and terminology used by Alberti in *De pictura* and *De re aedificatoria*, I show how Machiavelli's interpretations of sight, appearances, and cunning serve to express the potential for political purpose in the *arte moderna*. This potential is rooted in visual *arte*'s relation to religious devotion, which ultimately

enforces its political utility for a ruler apt to conceal certain cruelties and reveal favorable appearances in the face of tumult.

In the third and final chapter, I delve deeper into a textual analysis of Machiavelli's description of Borgia's *spettacolo*. I solidify my claim that this is meant to be read as Machiavelli's practical advice on how a Florentine ruler can claim legitimacy and glorify the *patria*. Machiavelli's portrayal of the sublime spectacle of Orco's death in Chapter VII of *The Prince* is best thought of as an *ekphrasis* of a painting rather than the alternatives of ritual or theatre, offered by Hochner and Rebhorn. A literal reading will offer, at best, an understanding of this scene as indicative of the power that small-scale violence, or "cruelty well used" has in securing the fear and awe of the citizen spectators. King adds a devotional component to this reading in his theory of the political sublime which articulates the temporary apotheosis of Cesare Borgia for having Orco displayed in two pieces, an act so swift and cruel yet indicative of civic mercy and benevolence that only a god could be responsible (*Quinquennial Terror* 71). This devotional aspect is significant to my reading and I argue that the effects of the political sublime can be achieved and maintained through painting or sculpture that imitates and perpetuates sublime events and occurrences. Normally excluded from analyses of this passage is Machiavelli's explicit reference to the "piece of wood and bloody knife" (*The Prince* 30). The inclusion of tree stumps accompanied by an axe in Renaissance painting is iconographically tied to the creative process behind the making of an artwork and can be found in Fra Filippo Lippi's *Adoration* altarpiece painted for the Medici's private chapel (Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 222-30). Expanding on the iconography of the scene and comparing it to themes of sacred art of the Florentine Renaissance and the Medici chapel's altarpiece, I posit that Machiavelli is intending the reader to consider his depiction of Orco's corpse an artwork with devotional and political implications.

Hidden within this *ekphrasis* is a message directed at Machiavelli's Medici readers indicating his awareness and understanding of the function of *arte* as primarily aimed at political outcomes favorable to Florence's ruling family and their competitors alike. Exposing their facade, Machiavelli emphasizes the importance of the political imagination in the preservation and continual renewal of the *patria*'s legitimacy, and considers *arte* the appropriate means through which the imagination can be politicized under the immediate circumstances of cinquecento Florence. Machiavelli's vision of *arte* in *The Prince* is one which seeks to

perpetuate the sublime power of the *sacerdotium* under the secular political authority of the *regnum* for the glory of the *patria.*

Literature Review

Contextualizing and historicizing Machiavelli's advice

In *Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas*, Quentin Skinner argues in favor of the notion that in order to better understand Machiavelli's novel contributions to political thought, it is important to contextualize his writing and compare his rhetoric, style, tropes and ideas to those from pre-existing works available to him (24). Through this, one can make proper judgements as to what is novel and what is part of an extant tradition. Contextualists would agree that many of Machiavelli's ideas are rooted in (or provide a spin on) civic humanism (Walsh 280). While emphasizing Machiavelli's connection to humanist rhetoric and the art of oratory, Machiavellian scholarship overlooks his relation to the visual arts. Political theorists in general have overlooked the power of aesthetics in political power. Skinner, Pocock and Viroli offer interpretations of Machiavelli's theory on statecraft and power maintenance with little to no consideration for visual art as a viable tool. However, their contextualist approach does not preclude it, as it welcomes a reading of Machiavelli considered within his "particular historical, cultural, and social context" (Walsh 280). The argument suggesting Machiavelli valued the use of visual artistry as an additional means of political cunning and power departs from the literature without directly contradicting most of it. Public art was a relevant political forum in quattro and cinquecento Florence. Therefore, my interpretation fits well with the contextualist approach, in that it considers Machiavelli in his immediate political and social context, in which visual art and aesthetics played an active role.

Part of this thesis' goal is to attempt a contextual and historical reading of *The Prince* by tying it more closely to the political and religious climate of early cinquecento Florence. Doing so leads one to question the tenacity of scholarly disregard for the inclusion of a lesson relating to visual art in Machiavelli's work. For instance, in *The Machiavellian Moment*, Pocock's thesis of fitting Machiavelli into a grander narrative that is the foundation of the American constitution causes him to leave out, among other things, crucial points relating to the significance of Florentine visual art in *The Prince*. Pocock ascribes purpose to Machiavelli's text that goes beyond its immediate context by applying the concept of virtue and the need to direct the flow of *fortuna* to the American founding. While his grander thesis speaks to an event exterior to Machiavelli in both time and place, he departs from saying anything of particular significance to an understanding of Machiavelli in the context of the particularly Florentine crossover of politics

and aesthetics. Applying Machiavelli to the American founding is to strip Machiavelli of his originality driven by the necessities of his time. A significant part of Machiavelli's teaching in *The Prince* emphasizes the role of circumstance in a prince's success or failure, and the *virtù* with which a prince must act in order to adapt to such varying circumstances that may arise. There is no absolute recipe for political success. Machiavelli offers his Medici readers specific advice on the use of *arte* reflective of their own circumstances - special attention must therefore be directed to this dimension of the text.

The use of visual art in cinquecento Florence would be included in what Machiavelli deems to be an act of *virtù*. Skinner emphasizes the "creative powers" of man characteristic of Renaissance humanism, a power that can "bring about a transformation of the physical world" (*The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* 98). These "creative powers", along with the feeling of possessing "God-like qualities" was constitutive of a *vir virtutis* and is echoed in Machiavelli's depiction of Cesare Borgia in Chapter VII of *The Prince*. Overlooked by Skinner, however, is Machiavelli's engagement with the humanist tradition of writing about the *arte moderna,* most notably featured in the works of Leon Battista Alberti. For instance, the *virtù* of the painter and sculptor described by Alberti is echoed in Machiavelli's descriptions of ideal rulers and founders. Both are shown to have to "avoid the vicissitudes of fortune" and "create worthy inventions" (Nethersole, *Art of Renaissance Florence* 59). While there is nothing particularly political about Alberti's description - it is focused on the process of creating art - Machiavelli's concept of *ingegno* along with his imagery of statecraft as a process of disassembling and reassembling (a form of craftsmanship as Pitkin refers to it) is all about meeting certain political ends (Pitkin 38, 54). This does not mean, however, that the aesthetic component to statecraft is merely metaphorical and is uncalled for in practice. On the contrary, it is a typology that should be read as a cue to consider the aesthetic possibilities in practical politics. My alternative reading of Cesare's purpose as exemplifying the political utility of art in Chapter VII does not negate his ultimate failure or the lesson that comes along with it, but isolates his sublime act in Cesena, as Machiavelli does, and considers it as having its own additional lesson "deserving of notice and of being imitated by others" (*The Prince* 29) - namely, the Medici rulers who would have been sensitive to its iconography.

Viroli shows how Machiavelli considered politics as having a transcendental power derived from the pursuit of glory. He writes, "when [Machiavelli] reflects on politics having in

mind his beliefs on man's fragility and mortality, he perceives it as the only path open towards eternity, as the only way to defeat death" (*Machiavelli* 41). For the ruler, the key to attaining this glory is in understanding and mastering the Machiavellian "art of the state". Whereas Viroli overlooks the visual components to ruling a state and claims that Machiavelli calls primarily for eloquence and mastery in oratory (71), I argue that Machiavelli suggests this eloquence be augmented with a visual and more powerful kind of art - the political sublime. Viroli describes Machiavelli's critique of the "medicean art of the state" as focused mostly on patronage and the building of extravagant architectural structures and commissioning of private art (56). This approach worked for Cosimo, according to Viroli, because the Medici did not have as many enemies during his rule as they did when they made their return in 1512 (57). He posits that if they are to secure power (and republican liberty), the Medici cannot use the same methods as Cosimo due to the different circumstances presented (57). The collection and commissioning of private art would not yield the same political effects as commissioning art visible to the public, but Viroli is wrong to assume that Machiavelli's criticism of private opulence extends to the largely successful "medicean art of the state" of public art patronage. Viroli may be correct in stating that Machiavelli values the art of speech and the written word as political motivators, however, Machiavelli also uses words to express the idea, and quite possibly the superiority, of images as political motivators and pathways to establishing legitimacy and securing glory in the eyes of the people. The gap in knowledge is due to the view that Renaissance humanism was almost exclusively literary, whereas the political realities of Florence had, since at least Cosimo de Medici, enjoyed a distinctively visual component. Renaissance Florence was a visual culture, and both Machiavelli and the Medici understood this well.

The "Machiavelli as political scientist" argument articulates Machiavelli's vision of the "art of the state" but confines it to a purely rational process of decision making, state building and power politics without truly considering the aesthetic side of the "art of the state" which I argue to be present in Machiavelli's work (Walsh 287). My thesis challenges Cassier's argument that *The Prince* was a calculative and dispassionate book with a purely descriptive and universalistic approach to power politics (66). Butterfield provides a more accurate reading in his assertion that Machiavelli's political theory "claimed to combine the lessons of history, the wisdom of the ancients, and the examples of the noble and great" (58). Rather than being an objective realist, Machiavelli was "carried away by the fervor of his feeling and imagination"

with “an intellectual attitude, incapable of resisting the impact of emotion” (Chabod 49-50). I also take a stand against Meinecke’s (*Machiavellianism*) view of Machiavelli as an advocate for *realpolitik* as it is currently understood. As Zuckert asserts, modern *realpolitik* not only “recognizes that nations always act on the basis of their self-interest, but argues that they should do so openly and unapologetically” (“Machiavelli and the End of Nobility in Politics” 98). This is not how Machiavelli suggests a prince should rule. As Grant rightly observes, Machiavelli claims that “rulers must attend to the way their actions will appear, they must speak a moral language, and they should exploit the opportunities to advance their aims that public moral discourse offers” (41). This “moral language” can extend to the use of images and aesthetics as the cunning artifice that conceals a ruler’s actions. Opposing the realist interpretation of Machiavelli as “political scientist” concerned primarily with military-based expressions of power, I build mostly on Rebhorn and King’s analysis of Machiavelli’s representation of Borgia and his *spettacolo* by adding my own iconographic study of the passage, and suggest that Machiavelli considers the political utility of the visual art of his day.

The argument this thesis puts forward thus combines the historical, contextualist, and textual approaches to reading Machiavelli. The Straussian textualist approach emphasizes that “truly doing justice to Machiavelli’s work means looking forward from the pre-modern perspectives, not backwards from the vantage point of the present” (Walsh 285). According to this interpretation, the contextualist approach is flawed because it imposes modern understandings of history onto a time period that was unaware of its own trajectory. Strauss posits that Machiavelli “could not have known the thought of the present, which emerged as it were behind his back” (12). However, one should not assume that Machiavelli was unaware of the political trends of his own time in relation to the visual arts the way modern art historians are, “who now collapse the family’s cultural patronage into its political aspirations without a second thought” (Solum 9). Furthermore, new knowledge and further insight can be gained by using modernity as a starting point from which to uncover valid theories that may have otherwise been overlooked. It is for this reason that I consider Machiavelli’s conception of art as a vehicle for the political sublime. Although I engage in the contextual approach, I do not simply take modern concepts that carry implications that go beyond the scope of what would have been conceivable

to a Renaissance Florentine (i.e. propaganda).[1] Understanding that those involved in politics during Machiavelli's life saw a potential for art to legitimize and glorify the *patria* along with their own political rule is paramount in discussing Machiavelli's descriptive and normative political theory on the acquisition and maintenance of power. Since this point has been overlooked in the works of the scholars engaged with in this brief literature review, I take it upon myself to unveil an as of yet undervalued, yet contextually and textually significant reading of relevant sections from Machiavelli's *The Prince.*

Bringing in scholarship on Florentine Renaissance art history allows for one to consider more closely the cultural milieu Machiavelli was writing in and how it intersected with political life. Nethersole, Lee, Jones, Bullard, Procaccini, Keizer, and Solum are some art historians who take seriously the political implications behind the commissioning of public art works in Florence under the Medici and Soderini. What I believe to be missing from Machiavellian scholarship is the emphasis he places on the role of the leader as someone who knows how to use *arte* well, for the commonly understood notion of Machiavellian *virtù* alone is insufficient. True *virtù* in quattro and cinquecento Florence takes the aesthetic component to ruling into account.

[1] Although Machiavelli's view of the functionality of art articulated in this thesis contains significant parallels to what one would now consider propaganda, I have opted to refrain from using the term so as to distinguish the negative implications it carries as a 20th-21tst century term. I leave the possibility for further research and development on the notion of propaganda and Machiavellian aesthetic theory open to future consideration.

Chapter 1

The sublime politics of Florentine *arte*

"I love my patria more than my own soul"
- Niccolò Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori, Forlì, 16 April 1527

Understanding the Medici's relation to art throughout their reign, as well as Machiavelli's awareness of it, informs a novel reading of *The Prince* geared toward uncovering Machiavelli's advice on aesthetics. It furthermore solidifies Machiavelli's teaching of the pervasive role of the imagination in politics. Although he claims it more "fitting to go directly to the effectual truth of the thing than to the imagination of it" (*The Prince* 61), imagination appears as part of the effectual truth of Renaissance politics and should thus be treated with the same kind of seriousness one would approach military and diplomatic affairs. Machiavelli's view of visual *arte* as a means to legitimacy during times of tumult is one that was not at odds with his cultural and political milieu. Although the list of artworks commissioned by the Medici is extensive, Botticelli's frescoes of the hanging Pazzi conspirators (1478) painted on the Bargello walls outside in the Piazza della Signoria is particularly exemplary of the use of the sublime depicted in art and will thus be focused on in this first chapter (Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 56). The Medici's aesthetic response to the Pazzi conspiracy is a prime example of the family's use of fear and awe inspired through *arte* to secure legitimacy and glory (Gill 65).

The use of *arte* for political purposes was not limited to the Medici's reign over Florence; it was also a significant strategic component under Soderini's republic. Michelangelo's *David* (1501-4), for example, served as a symbol of the Florentine government's strength and perseverance. The sculpture's placement outside the Palazzo della Signoria suggests it acted primarily as a "vehicle of emblematic function" meant to portray and inspire civic *virtù* (Levine 34). Machiavelli would have been aware of this function, as he was no stranger to the possibilities of art as an extension and indicator of political power. In addition to working as a military strategist and political informant and secretary for Soderini's Republic, Machiavelli was involved in the commissioning of Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari* and Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina* frescos. The frescoes were more than just works of visual art; they served as visual indicators of Florence's political legitimacy, power, and glory. Focusing on the art commissioned as a response to the Pazzi conspiracy, Soderini's commission of Michelangelo's

David, and Machiavelli's involvement in the commissioning of the *Battle* frescoes, this first chapter contextualizes the state of art and politics in Medici and early cinquecento republican Florence relative to Machiavelli himself, which I argue ultimately informed his aesthetic advice and its place in his theory of the political sublime in *The Prince*.

Borgia's *spettacolo* and the political sublime

Although the term "sublime" would not come into popular use until the 17th century, an understanding of the paralyzing effects of terrifying and awesome expressions of power through literature was nascent in Longinus' *Peri Hupsous*, which came to influence both Michelangelo and one of Machiavelli's first critical readers, Giovanni Botero (King, *Quinquennial Terror* 70). Botero recognized Machiavelli's literary approach to *crudeltà bene usate* in Loginus' theories and coined it "the politics of the sublime" in a 1585 pamphlet (Kahn 77). Post-Renaissance theories of the sublime were primarily led by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke. While theorists like Kant and Burke have rendered the aesthetic sublime less potent, the critics of the 16th century saw works of art, like Michelangelo's *David,* as both terrifying and awe-inspiring, indicating that an understanding of the sublime as an aesthetic phenomenon existed in Renaissance Florence (Levine, 33).

In *Critique of Judgement*, Kant describes the sublime as "limitless, so that the mind in the presence of the sublime, attempting to imagine what it cannot, has pain in the failure but pleasure in contemplating the immensity of the attempt" (246). Kant recognizes that in order for something to be sublime it needs to overwhelm the senses. Burke, in *The Sublime and Beautiful,* realizes that the sublime has a violent capacity. He states that the sublime primarily evokes "distress" but also "delight":

> The passions which belong to self-preservation turn on pain and danger; they are simply painful when their causes immediately affect us; they are delightful when we have an idea of pain and danger, without being actually in such circumstances; this delight I have not called pleasure, because it turns on pain, and because it is different enough from any idea of positive pleasure. Whatever excites this delight, I call sublime (166).

Burke digresses from the Kantian sublime in his suggestion that the sublime can be caused by human acts of violence. These acts of public violence take the form of a spectacle which attracts an audience more drawn to act as spectators to such an event than to an artistic or theatrical representation. He elaborates on the sublime's violent and spectacular capacities as follows:

> Chuse a day, in which to represent the most sublime and affecting tragedy we have; appoint the most favourite actors; spare no cost upon the scenes and decorations; unite the greatest efforts of poetry, painting and music; and when you have collected your audience, just at the moment when their minds are erect with

> expectation, let it be reported that a state criminal of high rank is on the point of being executed in the adjoining square; in a moment the emptiness of the theatre would demonstrate the comparative weakness of the imitative arts, and proclaim the triumph of the real sympathy (33).

Both Burke and Kant consider the sublime as having a voyeuristic effect that creates a mix of contrasting extreme emotions. Primary among these emotions are fear and awe, or repulsion and attraction. Whereas Burke contends that the "imitative arts" are not as successful at evoking the sublime as a public execution is, cinquecento discourse on the art of Michelangelo suggests otherwise. The term *terribilità* was used in describing the *David*, which aesthetically captured a look that was both heroic and menacing (Levine 33). Like the sublime, *terribilità* "derives its potency from [its] ambiguity" and is meant to indicate something at once terrible and awesome (Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 212). It is therefore not beyond the lexicon of the time to call certain artworks of the Renaissance "sublime". Further, Borgia's *spettacolo* is described as having an identical effect. When read as an *ekphrasis* of an artwork, the passage unmistakably exemplifies the potential of the "imitative arts" as vehicles for the sublime.

Although Machiavelli never explicitly uses the term "political sublime", he nevertheless implies it in his descriptions of the ideal prince – someone to be both loved and feared – and in his vivid depictions of the violent and the spectacular enacted by Cesare Borgia. Burke's definition allows for the sublime to be applied to politics, especially in its inclusion of physical violence. There are political implications in the Burkean image of a crowd being drawn to observe a public execution of a criminal in place of attending a play. The passage highlights the power and control a state can have over its people when it invokes this kind of violent sublime act. If we turn to Machiavelli, the political sublime takes a more aesthetic form. The emphasis is less on the action of violence and more on the presentation of the scene. Indeed, Machiavelli is not describing a public execution but rather a post-execution display evocative of Botticelli's frescoes of the hanging Pazzi conspirators.

Cesare Borgia's public display of the dismembered corpse of his appointed minister Remirro de Orco in the piazza of Cesena was a statement of his authority and power over the people who he feared might come to hate him because of the harsh laws put in place by Orco (*The Prince* 29-30). Machiavelli therefore adds a sense of the political utility of the sublime - the sublime as an aesthetic persuasive instrument rather than a purely aesthetic experience. This effect may have missed critical attention from contemporary audiences due to the vagaries in the

translation of the Italian. Mansfield's translation best captures the original Italian and remains true to Machiavelli's description of the scene and the people's reaction, an important aspect to consider when making the case for Machiavelli's articulation of what would later be called the sublime:

> And because he knew that past rigours had generated some hatred for Remirro, to purge the spirits of that people and to gain them entirely to himself, he wished to show that if any cruelty had been committed, this had not come from him but from the harsh nature of his minister. And having seized this opportunity, he had him placed one morning in the piazza at Cesena in two pieces, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him. The ferocity of this spectacle left the people at once satisfied and stupefied (*The Prince* 30).[2]

Firstly, the original Italian indicates that Orco was displayed *in dua pezzi* – that is in two pieces. The emphasis is on the vivid image of a block of wood, a bloody knife, and the dismembered corpse of Remirro displayed in such a fabricated manner so as to attract the viewers' curiosity while also repelling them. Mansfield and the original Italian state that they were at once satisfied and stupefied (*satisfatti e stupidi*). These words are important when considering the image evoked by Machiavelli as sublime. The Latin for satisfied is *satis* and means enough. "Stupefy" has its roots in the Latin *stupere* meaning to be struck senseless. Mansfield's translation, like the original Italian captures what Burke would later call "delight" with the idea of "pain/danger", or the sublime. Burke states that this delight is not pleasurable "because it turns on pain, and because it is different enough from any idea of positive pleasure" (166). *Satisfatti* is therefore a close approximation to Burke's "delight". *Stupidi* fits closer to Kant's emphasis on the overwhelming of the senses as a key characteristic of the sublime. One can see in this passage from *The Prince* an acknowledgement of the political sublime and a mild anticipation of a synthetic view of the Burkean and Kantian sublime with an additional aesthetic component.

If read literally, the parallels between Machiavelli's description of the violent spectacle set up by Borgia and Burke's description of the public's interaction with the spectacle of the state criminal's public execution are also clear. Both describe an act of violence perpetrated by the state as a spectacle meant to be viewed by the public. Both indicate a form of attraction from the public to the spectacle, whether it be through the expression of "satisfaction" or Burkean "delight". The public is satisfied that a minister they had come to hate has been dealt with and

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[2] E perché conosceva le rigorosità passate avergli generato qualche odio, per purgare li animi di quelli populi, e guadagnarseli in tutto, volse mostrare che, se crudeltà alcuna era seguita, non era causata da lui ma da la acerba natura del ministro. E presa sopra a questo occasione, lo fece, a Cesena, una mattina mettere in dua pezzi in su la piazza, con uno pezzo di legne e uno coltello sanguinoso accanto: la ferocità del quale spettaculo fece quegli popoli in uno tempo rimanere satisfatti e stupidi (*Il principe* 70).

also “delighted” that they themselves are not in his position. The incident did not place the people within its immediate vicinity in any form of physical danger and so there is no physical pain or danger being experienced; yet the idea of “pain and danger” is nevertheless present in their minds, expressed through their stupefaction. It is sensible, then, to say that Machiavelli anticipates the Burkean sublime with his idea of the violent public spectacle, while emphasising its aesthetics and sense of political utility. Where Burke digresses from Machiavelli is, again, in his view of the “imitative arts” as weak relative to real or natural occurrences of the sublime. If one shifts away from reading the passage as a real-life occurrence to reading it as an image representing its referent through the subversion of Christian typologies, as is expanded upon in the final chapter of this thesis, one finds room for the “imitative arts”, such as painting and sculpture, in Machiavelli’s version of the political sublime. The intention and effects of key visual artworks commissioned in times of political tumult, from Lorenzo the Magnificent to Soderini, justifies the worth and relevance of considering such a claim.

Arte as a vessel for political glory and legitimacy: The Medici’s representation of the Pazzi conspiracy

There is a significant parallel between Florentine Renaissance art and politics – both art and politics can help one attain glory. The art and architecture that Cosimo de Medici patronized in early quattrocento Florence was not intended for the glory of the *patria* as much as it was for elevating the status of his family and establishing the idea of the validity of the Medici’s hereditary right of rule. At the same time, he sought to preserve his own image as a good Christian, to “immortalize himself” and absolve himself of the guilt he felt for partaking in usury (Strathern, *The Medici* 113-14) – a point exemplified in Benozzo Gozzoli’s meek and humble representation of Cosimo in the *Journey of the Magi to Bethlehem* fresco (1459) in comparison to the accompanying ornate figures and portraits in the work (Lee 163). *Arte* for the sake of private opulence, untamed liberality, or the pursuit of divine salvation, should not be among the prime motivators for a prince according to Machiavelli; legitimacy and glory are earned through cunning appearances made visible to the public (*The Prince* 71). After Cosimo’s passing, the Medici made use of sublime art to secure their legitimacy in the eyes of the people. For example, Lorenzo the Magnificent ensured that the aftermath of the Pazzi conspiracy, which saw his attempted murder and the murder of his brother Giuliano in the Cathedral of Santa Maria del

Fiore, would be visually preserved in a public space for the eyes of the Florentine people to be both drawn to and repelled by.

Renaissance Florence was "a profoundly visual culture" drawn to the sight of violence, whether real or represented in art (Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 43). In the *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli describes the Pazzi conspiracy as a set of "tumultuous accidents" and provides graphic detail of the visually oriented violence that ensued (324). The conspiracy against Lorenzo and Giuliano led by the Pazzi family was not only followed by spectacular violence and bloodshed, but also by artistic representations commemorating the violence and triumph of Lorenzo over the conspirators in response to the tumult. The event was commemorated in both text and image form between 1478-79. Prominent examples include Bertoldo di Giovanni's *Pazzi Conspiracy Medal*, Angelo Poliziano's *Coniurationis commentarium*, Botticelli's portrait of Giuliano, and most significantly, Botticelli's fresco of the conspirators displayed in the Piazza della Signoria (Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 40, 56). The large fresco depicted the Pazzi conspirators dead and hanging in "lifelike detail" (Strathern, *The Medici* 186). According to Strathern, this was "art as celebration: a display of power and brilliance, which also stood as a warning to any who might contemplate opposing the Medici" (9). Although the work was removed and destroyed after the Medici were cast out of Florence in 1494, a second-hand description of the fresco from the 1540s survives:

> He [Botticelli] painted in 1478 on the facade of where there once was the *bargiello* over the *doghana*, Messer Jacopo, Francesco and Rinato de' Pazzi, and Messer Francesco Salviati, archbishop of Pisa, and two Jacopo Salviatis, the one the brother and the other the relative of the said Messer Francesco, and Bernardo Bandini, all hanging from the neck, and Napoleone Franzesi hanging from a foot, that were involved in the conspiracy against Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici, under which were epigraphs composed by Lorenzo, and among them that beneath Bernardo Bandini said in this way: 'I am Bernardo Bandini a new Judas / I was a deadly traitor in church / [I am] an outlaw who awaits a harsher death (Trans. Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 56).[3]

[3] 'Dipinse nel 1478 nella facciata dove già era il Bargiello sopra la doghana, Ms. Jacopo, Francesco et Renato de Pazj, et Ms Franc. Salviatj archiveschovo di Pisa, et duj Jacopi Salviatj, l'uno fratello et l'altro affine di detto Messer Franc., et Bernardo Bandinj, impicchatj per la gola, et Napoleone Franzesi impicchato per uno pie, che trovorono nella congiura contro a Giuliano et Lorenzo de Medicj, allj qualj Lorenzo poi fece ai piedj li epitaffi, et in fra l'altrj a Bernardo Bandino, che in questo modo diceva:

> Son Bernardo Bandinj un nuovo Giuda,
> Traditore micidiale in chiesa io fuj,
> Ribello per aspettare morte più cruda.' (Fabriczy 83-84).

Following the attempt on Lorenzo's life, any remaining visual reminders of the Pazzi family's now defunct power and influence, such as the family emblem of the dolphin along with their property, was either seized or destroyed by the state. The only visual reminder of the Pazzi was Botticelli's depiction of their hanging corpses, perpetually staining the eyes and minds of those who gazed at the Bargello walls (Gill 65). The visually striking image would have prompted reactions of both awe and fear for the now *de facto* ruler of Florence, Lorenzo *il magnifico*.

Among the leading conspirators was Archbishop Salviati, whose degrading execution infuriated Pope Sixtus IV. The Pope and Roman curia took Salviati's hanging as an act of sacrilege, but ultimately failed in their goal of excommunicating Lorenzo when Sixtus IV was instead himself excommunicated by Tuscan bishops (Gill 66). Preserving the harrowing image of the hanging Archbishop in visual art enhanced Lorenzo's appearance as above papal jurisdiction and authority. The image would have likely been seen as an indicator of Lorenzo's, and by extension Florence's, divine right over the papacy itself. Lorenzo "emerged as a hero" in the aftermath of the failed attempt at his life, and feelings of veneration toward him were enhanced by the images he commissioned (65). In Renaissance Florence, there persisted a common understanding among political actors of the effects of striking visual *arte* as a means of perpetuating a desired image, emotion, and political message to those prompted to gaze at such works. According to Nethersole, the works commissioned as a response to the Pazzi conspiracy provoked both fear and pathos in those viewing them, two common emotions expressed in the viewing of religious and devotional artworks (Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 41). Those in charge of perpetrating spectacular violent punishment and commissioning works in veneration of its outcome were usually cognizant of the potential in *arte* to elicit a devotional response, and Lorenzo, who used visual *arte* as a means of manipulation and a tool for governance in a time of tumult, was no exception (63). As a young boy living in Florence at the time, Machiavelli would have been faced with the sublime aesthetics of Botticelli's hanging conspirators.

In addition to Botticelli's fresco, Bertoldo di Giovanni's *Pazzi Conspiracy Medal* played a role in the "campaign to elicit sympathy for the regime" by "playing on the emotions while purporting to present historical fact" (Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 50). One of the medals depicts a bust of Lorenzo, while the other shows Giuliano, both elevated and aggrandized above the violence of the conspiracy in the cathedral choir depicted

beneath them (51). The elevation and magnification of Lorenzo and Giuliano's busts presented above the choir allows them to transcend the scene of violence depicted below while representing the sublime effect of apotheosis - Giuliano in death and Lorenzo in life. The wide dissemination of Bertoldo's medals was made possible due to multiple casts being produced, suggesting that persuasion through violence "needed a means of replication to ensure that as many [people] as possible were moved" (55). Because the image produced is an embellished snapshot of the events of the 26th of April 1478, it does not serve as a historical record of the conspiracy. Rather, it serves to display typologies from which anagogy can be derived. Art can embellish what it represents in reality so that reality may then be remembered in a particular desired way.

According to Nethersole, the images produced in response to the actual violence of the Pazzi conspiracy were "carefully mediated works of quasi-propaganda that pressed naturalism and mimesis into the service of power" (*Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 42). The execution of the Pazzi conspirators was presented as a spectacle to the visual culture of Renaissance Florence, but it was the artists commissioned to record it who materialized the memory of the event and ensured that the emotions experienced by the spectators be preserved in service of Lorenzo's legitimacy and glory (45). Imagination and the sublime, materialized through *arte*, became a means of manifesting political power. It is likely that Machiavelli drew inspiration from Lorenzo's use of Botticelli and his fresco as much as he did from Cesare's act of *crudeltà* against Remirro in writing his passage particularly "deserving of notice and of being imitated by others" (*The Prince* 29). Pairing this significant historical event for Florentine politics and art with a close reading of key passages from *The Prince,* such as Borgia's *spettacolo*, and Machiavelli's advice to a prince to "honour those who are excellent in an art" (91), reveals an as of yet undisclosed teaching of Machiavelli with regards to the visual arts: the memory of the political sublime can be secured through an aestheticization that only its representation in art can achieve. The artworks representing the Pazzi conspiracy serve as indicators of a political role of art in Florence under the Medici which relied on the visual participation of the people and their reactions of a devotional blend of fear and awe. The visual evocation of the *sacerdotium* in the *regnum* could effectively glorify and immortalize the image and memory of the ruler and *patria* following moments of political tumult and strife.

Although the examples of Botticelli's frescoes and Machiavelli's description of Remirro's corpse involve manifestations of violence in the crafting of their aesthetic sublime effect, violence itself is not sufficient or even necessary for the political sublime to yield practical political effects. The criteria of value that quattro and cinquecento rulers like Lorenzo held to be most significant was that of aesthetics; violence itself is insufficient. Violence, or awe-inspiring acts, presented through aesthetic means appears to have been what was most favorable for Lorenzo's image under the circumstances of the Pazzi conspiracy. This aesthetic representation of fear and awe inducing acts for political ends in times of tumult was equally favored by the Florentine Republic under *gonfaloniere* Soderini. Machiavelli, cognizant of the subtleties and extravagances of his political environment and the methods through which it functioned, would include this sentiment in *The Prince* and use it as a teaching on the effects of visual *arte* on the political imagination of both ruler and ruled.

Arte as a symbol of Republican *virtù*: Michelangelo's *David*

The use of visual art as a means of portraying sublime power, and of eliciting the sublime effects of fear and awe in its viewers, was not exclusive to Medici rule. Under Soderini's republic, and during Machiavelli's service in the Florentine government, Michelangelo's *David* was completed and strategically displayed in front of the Palazzo della Signoria so as to face the south, and more specifically Rome, where the exiled Medici resided (Levine 34). The Medici were determined to reclaim their power and legitimacy in Florence ever since their expulsion in 1494, and in 1501, their alliance with Cesare Borgia made their reclamation more tenable (34). Michelangelo's *David* acted as a symbol of Florence's unflinching strength and *virtù* menacingly facing the Medicean Goliath that threatened Florence's republic (34).

There is a duality to *David*'s aesthetic, likened to the sublime, that the Florentines of the time were distinctly aware of. In his article discussing the significance of the *David*'s location, Levine describes the sculpture's dual nature as follows:

> The statue has two primary views: the front of the figure and the view from the left. The front view emphasizes the heroic, Herculean stance embodying strength and a powerful defensive capacity. But as the sharply turned profile of the head directs our attention towards the left side of the figure, we discern aspects that are active, aggressive and even menacing. These culminate in the head with its *terribilità* and intensely staring eyes directed to a dangerous and threatening Goliath (33).

Important to note is the audience for whom the *David* was meant. It was not intended for the Medici, who were outside Florence and beyond its periphery. Rather, it served as a visual

indicator and symbol of the Florentine government intended for the eyes of the people. Through its iconography and location, citizens would be able to associate the sublime *virtù* and *terribilità* it represented with the potency of their government. A symbol like *David* was exactly what Florence needed at the time leading up to the statue's public reveal. Florentines were at this time faced with uncertainty and dread over the preservation of their liberty, due in large part to both the Medici's and Borgia's increasing ambitions to take Florence (Strathern, *The Artist, the Philosopher, and the Warrior* 311). At the time of the *David*'s reveal, Machiavelli had just returned to Florence after following Borgia around Italy on his military exploits. Serving as an informant to the Signoria and secretary to the Nine of War regarding Cesare's plans and tactics, Machiavelli witnessed and reported on Borgia's cunning and cruelty firsthand; he was aware of the vulnerable position Florence was in. Although the death of Pope Alexander VI in 1503 diminished Borgia's capabilities, Giovanni and Giuliano de Medici's increasing political influence in Rome was nevertheless seen as a veritable threat against Florence (Levine 34). Despite Florence's vulnerability, this period saw a vast expansion in the arts which ushered Machiavelli's beloved *patria* into a period of unprecedented glory (Strathern, *The Artist, the Philosopher, and the Warrior* 311). The Medici would not make their return to Florence until 1512, and until then, Michelangelo's *David* served its political purpose as symbol for Republican *virtù*; it tapped into the political imagination of the Florentines and perpetuated the appearance of a glorious state.

As a work of art taken on its own, the *David* exemplifies its literal referent - the biblical hero prior to his attack and defeat of Goliath. However, the political circumstances under which the sculpture was created, along with the location in which it was ultimately set, reveal an emblematic function beyond one of religious intent. Commissioned by Soderini and the Opera del Duomo, the *David* was originally intended to occupy a space in the tribunes of the Santa Maria Novella Cathedral. This location was ultimately changed after a meeting between Florentine artists including Botticelli, da Vinci, Piero di Cosimo and Filippino Lippi, and members of the Signoria, which took place on January 25, 1504 (Levine 31). The decision to have *David* displayed in front of the Palazzo della Signoria where his menacing gaze would face southward towards Rome, rather than in one of the niches of the tribunes of the Cathedral, enhanced the significance of the work as one of imminent political import. It also suggests a

close relationship between artists and political actors in Renaissance Florence, which allowed political intent to be manifested physically in the works of visual artists like Michelangelo.

While Botticelli's fresco was commissioned as a response to the deposed Pazzi threat against the Medici in 1478, Michelangelo's *David* functioned as a response to the Medici threat against the Florentine Republic in 1504. Both artworks made use of sublime aesthetics and prompted a mix of awe and fear in their spectators as means of enhancing the appearance of glory and legitimacy in the *patria*. Both works also reappropriate and invert the traditional religious iconography and typologies they are founded on for political ends. The violence and pain depicted in Botticelli's hanging conspirators would have echoed those found in devotional Christian art depicting the Passion of Christ and the suffering of saints, which also created the effect of both attraction and repulsion in its viewers (Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 79, 109). However, whereas religious art depicting the violence and suffering of Christ and the saints prompted religious devotion to the figures depicted, the sublime violence of Botticelli's fresco directed this devotion to Lorenzo, the one responsible for the suffering and death of the conspirators. It thus exemplifies a subversion of the religious aesthetic it echoes. Michelangelo's work echoes religious art not in its depiction of violence per se, but in the biblical exemplar of David himself. In this instance, the biblical hero becomes a civic exemplar inspiring political *virtù* through his *terribilità*. These works thus maintain an appearance of a religious aesthetic while serving entirely political ends. Whereas religious art functioned as private devotional pieces meant to guide the soul of the viewer to salvation, the secular art seen here was meant as public displays of sublime power whose political effects would lead to the temporal salvation and elevation of the *patria* and of republican rule under tumultuous circumstances.

Whether or not the *David* was a direct cause of the Republic's persistence under the continued possibility of Medici invasion is beyond the scope of this thesis to answer. What is worth considering, however, is Machiavelli's awareness of the political potential of the visual arts to ease tumult through satisfying and stupefying means, exemplified in this instance, through Michelangelo's sublime sculpture. Machiavelli would have been faced with *David*'s *terribilità* almost every day he was in Florence. The statue stood for many of the political virtues Machiavelli would later emphasize as significant for the acquisition and maintenance of power in *The Prince*, such as the use of one's own arms (56), the cunning appearance of religion (70), and

the heroic and menacing *virtù* a ruler should strive to imitate (22). Considering the fact that Machiavelli colored *The Prince* with examples based on history, myth, and his own experiences, an understanding of *arte* as sublime aesthetic declarations of glory and legitimacy during periods of tumult undoubtedly made its way into his text directed at the Florentine family so invested in this aspect of the political world they had a hand in crafting. This aspect of Florentine politics was accessible to the sight and touch of the ever-observant Niccolò Machiavelli, who took part in approving a politically significant state-commissioned work shortly after the completion of the *David*.

Machiavelli and the *Battle* frescoes of the Great Council Hall

In February 1498, prior to Soderini's republic, Savonarola's "bonfires of the vanities" took place in the Piazza della Signoria for Florence's population to witness. In these bonfires, books, art, and extravagant objects all deemed "vain" were cast and destroyed in a flaming spectacle. Rather than secure and perpetuate fear and awe for Florence's friar-turned-charismatic leader, the spectacles eventually garnered disapproval from the Florentine people (Gill 152). Later that year, in the same piazza, Savonarola was executed by hanging over a bonfire lit beneath his flailing body, following his arrest and confession to acting as a false prophet (Jones 37).

Savonarola's ecclesiastical rule of Florence was a tumultuous one. Initially gaining favor from Florence's devout population after the Medici's expulsion in 1494, Savonarola's religious declarations for piety and austerity quickly overextended themselves and led to the Florentine people's rejection of the self-proclaimed prophet's rule over their *patria* (Gill 152). Savonarola also lost favor with the Vatican and Pope Alexander VI, whose authority and divine right he openly challenged (Jones 37). Under Savonarola's rule, the aesthetic magnificence perpetuated by Medici patronage was suppressed. Public extravagances, such as festivals, were outlawed. Savonarola encouraged a political and religious lifestyle to be led in *imitatio christi*, drawing Florence back to an almost medieval paradigm in its style of governance and the arts (Gill 151). The "bonfires of the vanities", of 1497 and 1498 saw the destruction of works by artists such as Donatello and Botticelli, two prominent artists frequently patronized by the Medici (Keizer 318). The visual effect produced by the bonfires "replaced a prolific artistic production with a sense of absence" (318). What was, under the Medici, a "trust in art to articulate political meaning" became a condemnation of the arts for the sake of religious conviction under Savonarola (318).

Whereas Lorenzo and the Signoria under Soderini sought to use the appearance of religious aesthetics in concurrence with secular ideals through Botticelli's fresco and Michelangelo's *David* respectively, Savonarola's religious spectacles made little to no recourse to secular republican *virtù*. Although bringing him the love of the people initially, the friar's use of religion devolved into nonsensical fanaticism for religious piety at all levels of government and society, where the salvation of the soul took precedence over the salvation of the *patria*. Wars against France and Pisa left Florence in a state of crisis, and Florentines quickly began to realize that the religious devotion of Savonarola would not save them (Jones 38). Lacking under Savonarola's rule was what Machiavelli would later advise as necessary for a ruler who wants to be held in high esteem, and thus be supported in times of tumult: the honoring of "those who are excellent in an art" (*The Prince* 91). Although not the singular cause of his failure, this lack of an appreciation for the political use of the arts certainly did not contribute to Florence's potential for glory.

The reason for expounding the context of Savonarola's Florence is to show the political and social circumstances under which the Great Council Hall, which would later house the *Battle* frescoes, was set up. The Great Council was "an assembly of all citizens" which served to perpetuate, for a time, the appearance that Savonarola spoke and acted not only on behalf of God, but also on behalf of the people (Jones 36). Despite Savonarola's disapproval of aesthetic magnificence, he called for the ornamentation of the Hall with works of religious art in honor of Florence's citizens. The majority of these works weren't newly commissioned by Savonarola, but rather constituted looted treasures of the ousted Medici family (Wilde 76). The Great Council Hall combined populism with religious fervor - the Hall included a chapel where sermons were given, and council hall meetings began with a mass (Jones 36). Religious art was given precedence over all others within the Hall up until the commissioning of Leonardo and Michelangelo's *Battle* frescoes. Among the newly commissioned works were an altarpiece and a "life-size marble statue of the Saviour" (Wilde 77). The latter was ordered, in 1502, to be stationed above the *gonfaloniere*'s seat exemplifying Savonarola's decree that "none but Christ is the new sovereign of Florence" (78). Unlike Botticelli's fresco and Michelangelo's *David,* the art of the Great Council Hall was religious not only in appearance but in its function as well. It was not an inversion and subversion of Catholic teachings, but a direct championing of them - that is, of course, until Machiavelli stepped in and took part in commissioning the *Battle*

frescoes. The Great Council Hall therefore lacked an aesthetic of the political sublime as Machiavelli would understand it. Nevertheless, Savonarola left behind a space in which art's political potential could be achieved. As Jones posits, after Savonarola's execution, it was incumbent on Machiavelli, as councilor to the newly elected *gonfaloniere* Soderini, to "give compromise a glorious face" (39). The compromise here involved maintaining Florence's freedom "from a return to Medici rule" and keeping the Republic "safe from the tyranny of religious fanaticism" (39).

Machiavelli understood the significance of maintaining the use of the Great Council Hall as the "physical expression of the Republic" and "sacred manifestation of the Florentine People" (Jones 51). After its closure, Machiavelli offered advice to Pope Clement VII regarding the Hall and its role in securing the consent of the people through their "satisfaction":

> It remains to satisfy the third and final class of men, who are all the universality of citizens … and therefore, I judge that it will be necessary to reopen the [Great Council] Hall … Without satisfying the many, you cannot have any stable republic. Nor will the great mass of Florentine citizens be satisfied, if you don't reopen the Hall; therefore, if you want to make a republic in Florence, open this Hall… ('*Discursus florentinarum rerum post mortem iunioris Laurentii Medices*', in Niccolo Machiavelli, *Opere*, vol. II 216-17).

Machiavelli's vision for the Great Council Hall's potential in satisfying and garnering consent from the people can be further understood in his involvement in the commissioning of Leonardo Da Vinci's mural depicting Florence's victory over Milan at Anghiari in 1440 (Jones 53-4). The mural was to be the first secular work of art stationed in the Great Council Hall (54). Just as was the case with Michelangelo's *David*, the location of Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari*, and Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina* which was soon after commissioned as a complimentary piece, played a key role in the emblematic function of the artworks. The secular theme of a Florentine military victory was given a devotional and glorifying edge. It had the potential to both secularize the Great Council Hall and be further elevated by the Hall's sacred aura. The effect on the people viewing the grand murals would be wholly political, however. Through their awe-inspiring aestheticization of war and victory, the frescoes would instill the viewers with a sense of *virtù* which would ultimately translate to a citizenry apt to either fight in support of the Florentine government, or, as Jones suggests, "vote taxes to pay for the Arno diversion and any other measure that Soderini and his military expert Machiavelli judged necessary" in the war against Pisa (130). The completion of the frescoes was pushed by an urgency on the part of the Florentine government to reignite the faith and devotion of the people to Florence's war efforts

against Pisa, Milan, and the French (Wilde 80). Machiavelli was so intent on having Leonardo complete his work that he even helped renegotiate terms to grant the artist an extension on the due date of the mural's completion in a contract both he and Leonardo signed (Beltrami 87). As Wilde writes, "In representing these wars, the frescoes would have been a glorification of civilian preparedness, and this idea was a step on the way towards Machiavelli's law constituting the militia, a law which was perhaps the most notable political event in the short life of the democratic republic" (80). It is clear that Machiavelli saw the potential for the artworks to achieve this favorable political outcome in the face of war.

It is no surprise that Machiavelli was drawn to this project and keen on seeing its completion - it in many ways exemplified his views on the importance of cultivating a citizen army. The sublime depictions of two Florentine citizen military victories were to be set in a location with pre-established religious and spiritual significance (Wilde 79). The spaces reserved for the murals - "two rectangular spaces each of about 12 braccia in height and 30 braccia in width (=7 m. by 17.5 m.)" indicate that the *Battle* frescoes "were to be of extraordinary dimensions" (80). Since only a few early sketches and cartoons of the frescoes survive, one can only speculate the full extent of their sublime magnificence. The subject matter and depiction of raw emotional violence (seen through the surviving sketches) coupled with the immense size of the murals would have had an effect of both satisfaction and stupefaction on its viewers. Vasari describes a section of Leonardo's sketch for the *Battle of Anghiari* fresco as follows:

> He [Leonardo] began a cartoon of an episode in the story of Niccolò Piccinino, in which he depicted a group of horsemen fighting around a standard, a masterly composition. It is an odd thing to see that not only do the men show rage, disdain, and the desire for revenge, but the horses, too, are attacking each other with their teeth, and fight no less fiercely than the knights. One of the combatants has seized the standard with both hands and strives to tear it with main force from the hands of four others. An old soldier in a red cap has also seized the standard with one hand and is raising his scimitar in the other, uttering cries of rage as he deals a blow to sever the hands of two of his opponents. Under the feet of the horses two men, hurled to the ground, are engaged in a death struggle. One brings his dagger down with all his might to the throat of his enemy. It is scarcely possible to do justice to the skill of this drawing, the beauty of the details of the helmets, crests, and other ornaments or to the wonderful mastery which the artist shows in the forms and movements or the horses. Their muscular development, the animation of their action, and their exquisite beauty are rendered with the utmost fidelity (194-195).

The "rage", "disdain" and "desire for revenge" portrayed were coupled with visually pleasing ornaments adorned onto the soldiers' distinctive costumes, and the "exquisite beauty" of the horses depicted in life-like action. The final result would have been an aesthetically sublime work of art.

These facts give a fresh outlook on Machiavelli's advice in his articulation of an "art of war" in *The Prince* (58). They suggest that, for Machiavelli, this "art of war" went beyond a metaphor for military astuteness; it included a space for the visual arts as vehicles for the political sublime, which could serve to secure and perpetuate the awe and fear of citizens who would channel these emotions into serving their *patria*. In *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli writes of a similar sentiment in his description of ancient Roman rituals inspiring *virtù* in the people:

> Neither pomp nor magnificence of ceremony was lacking there, but the action of the sacrifice, full of blood and ferocity, was added, with a multitude of animals being killed there. This sight, being terrible, rendered men similar to itself. Besides this, the ancient religion did not beatify men if they were not full of worldly glory, as were captains of armies and princes of republics. Our religion has glorified humble and contemplative more than active men (131).

Machiavelli wished to go beyond using the ancients as vehicles through which the modern arts can be improved for their own sake. He wished to revive the Romans' *virtù* specifically, their political modes of engagement more than the purely cultural. This included frequent exposure to the spectacle of blood and sacrifice which "rendered men similar to itself" (131). Art, for Machiavelli, should then serve a similar purpose and make use of imagery inspiring ancient Roman *virtù* which would both strengthen and glorify the *patria* while legitimizing political rule. Like religion, it can be a corruptible tool if misused or a liberating one if directed at the glory and longevity of the *patria*. In either case, it relies on a form of fraudulence. Machiavellian *arte* is therefore not art for art's sake or merely for the sake of "rivaling the ancients", as Hans Baron suggests the various arts practiced by Renaissance humanists were (461), but art that inspires civic engagement through an aesthetic embellishment of the state. It is thus congruent with (but not exclusive to) Republican readings of Machiavelli in that art, like the ancient Roman rituals and religion, has the potential to serve both the public and private good through its function as facilitator for political legitimacy.

In the absence of a public appetite for bloody displays, these artistic displays of pro-civic sublime violence were more suitable to the times. The *Battle* frescoes were never quite finished, but through their display of spectacular violence and warfare, along with their location in a religiously sublime setting, they would have functioned as the artistic equivalent of the ancient Roman ceremonies. The commissions of the Pazzi conspiracy fresco, the *David*, and the *Battle* frescoes show that in times of tumult, it was believed that *arte* could win over the political

imagination and create outcomes favorable to the preservation of political society. Herein lies the potential for *arte* as a means to legitimacy. For Machiavelli, therefore, free republics and principalities alike are secured based on a form of deception which, in the context of tumultuous quattro and cinquecento Florence, is maintained through the facade of the visual arts: the deception of secular ideals interwoven with the appearance of religious custom to effectively displace the customs of religion. Reading *The Prince* with Machiavelli's personal experiences and knowledge of the political function of aesthetic appearances in mind reveals this teaching hidden beneath a rhetoric of *arte*.

Chapter 2

Machiavelli's understanding and use of *arte*

"The best art, they say/Is that which conceals art"

- Ovid, Metamorphoses

One should not rule out the inclusion of the visual arts in Machiavelli's statement that, "A prince should also show himself a lover of the virtues, giving recognition to virtuous men, and he should honor those who are excellent in an art" (*onorando gli eccellenti in una arte*) (*The Prince* 91). In quattrocento Florence, the word *arte* was commonly used to mean "craft" or "skill". However, the notion of *arte* as a visual aesthetic was nascent in the discourse and writings of visual art theorists like Leon Battista Alberti, who wrote on painting, sculpture, and architecture during this period. In the context of Florentine politics, the term *arte* was associated with political cunning. Lorenzo the Magnificent and the *Otto di Pratica*[4] developed a "vocabulary to express" the process of deception and of "artfully manipulating others' perceptions" (Bullard 355). In their correspondences, *arte* was used to mean "dissimulation" or "deceptive intent" (353, 355). In *The Prince*, Machiavelli continues to use *arte* in this way while hinting at the role of visual art in a prince's engagement in the *arte* of politics.

Artists like Botticelli, Leonardo, and Michelangelo were recognized in Renaissance Florence for more than just their paintings and sculptures; they were scientists, chemists, mathematicians, and architects. The best artists were highly sought after as aides in the job of creating politically effective illusions and in promoting the state to both outsiders and citizens. Lorenzo's use of Botticelli in helping secure his image as legitimate ruler of Florence after the Pazzi conspiracy is but one example. In Rome, 1481, Pope Sixtus IV sought the talents and services of Botticelli and employed him in painting frescoes for the Sistine Chapel in what was likely an attempt at matching the aesthetic glory of Florence (Strathern, *The Medici* 186). Leonardo and Michelangelo were also highly sought after for their work. Michelangelo was faced with competitive offers for his services by the Domopera, the Signoria, and private patrons before his services were secured by Soderini to paint the *Battle of Cascina* (Wilde 79). Also in high demand, Leonardo worked for Cesare Borgia between 1502-3 as his "chief military

[4] The *Otto di Pratica* were established after the 1480 reforms, prompted by the Pazzi Conspiracy, which "limited participation in key councils" to a close knit group of Medici loyalists. The *Otto* were in charge of "foreign affairs and secret matters of state" (*le cose externe et dello stato, e quali harranno nelle mani le cose più secrete)* (Bullard 346).

engineer" (Strathern, *The Artist, the Philosopher, and the Warrior* 220), in addition to working with Machiavelli in an effort to divert the Arno and flood Pisa in 1503 (Masters 100). Securing Leonardo's talents in the commission of the *Battle of Anghiari* was likewise a competitive feat (Wilde 79). Amidst the warfare and scandalous murders characteristic of Italian Renaissance politics, political actors recognized the power of art as an additional, and effectively less violent, means of political persuasion. During Cosimo's rule, Benozzo Gozzoli was employed to paint the *Journey of the Magi to Bethlehem* fresco for the Medici Palace chapel. Although not a public piece, the *Magi* fresco was a visual expression of the Medici's legitimacy aimed at the family's political allies and competitors who frequented the palace on matters of business and diplomacy (Lee 153). Machiavelli therefore meant to include these artists, and those like them, in his statement of who a prince should honor as they had a role to play in enriching the state and elevating its rulers. However, to come to a fuller understanding of Machiavelli's theory on art's political potential, it is necessary to consider how, and in what context, he uses "*arte"* more generally in *The Prince*. Machiavelli's use of words and imagery normally associated with the visual arts, and written on extensively by Alberti, must thus be acknowledged and analyzed.

Considered in this chapter is *arte* as the fox-like trait of cunning, and *arte* as a visual aesthetic. Although they denominate distinct concepts, there are overlaps between these definitions, and, when read alongside Alberti's works, Machiavelli's references to *arte* appear to be signifying a synthesized and novel understanding of the term as it pertains to its function for political legitimacy and longevity. This chapter introduces Alberti as a theorist who gives contemporary context to Machiavelli's rhetoric relating to perspective, appearances, and terms like *arte*, *disegno*, *imitazione*, and *colorire*. There has been a disregard of the renowned Renaissance humanist's influence on the ideas and rhetoric found in *The Prince.* Indeed, Alberti does not strike one as a relevant auctor at first glance, likely because he is best known for his work as an architect. However, a closer examination of his treatises on art and the city, such as *De pictura* (1436) and *De re aedificatoria* (1485), reveals surprising relevance to Machiavelli's writings and rhetoric on the political significance of aesthetics in the context of Florentine politics.

How to reach the Medici: Machiavelli's Albertian rhetoric

Most, if not all, of Machiavelli's significant works are written with a targeted reader in mind (King, *Rolling a Stone for the Medici* 46). As patrons of art and dedicatees of Machiavelli's

Prince and *Florentine Histories*, the Medici would have been attuned to the rhetorical cues signifying an appeal to the political use of visual art in Machiavelli's works. A seemingly contradictory statement can be found in Hale's *Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy*, which states that Machiavelli "as far as we know, was not [a lover of the fine arts]" (14). This claim, however, lacks evidence. Hale refers to the only instance in which Machiavelli mentions a work of art appearing in the introduction to *Discourses on Livy*, where "he laments that men study and cherish even the battered remains of an artistic statue but remain blind to the lessons of ancient history" (14-15). Mansfield suggests this passage indicates Machiavelli "waving aside the marvelous works of art created in his own lifetime and even in his own city of Florence under his very eyes" (Introduction to *Discourses on Livy* xviii). However, the critique of ancient statuary was part of an argument that criticized the slavish dedication of humanists to the ancient modes of thought; it should not be taken as a slight at the works of art being produced in Florence. Machiavelli's rejection of a slavish adherence to humanist literary models and morals is expressed in Godman's *From Poliziano to Machiavelli*:

> Underlining, by the Latin subtitles given to each chapter, his departures from the prescriptive style of the moralism that he was subverting, Machiavelli proposed a functional ethic of power for an individual prince to replace the standards that had been set, before 1512, for a class of "*principes"* by pseudo-Aristotle, "Brunian" humanism, and a miscellany of Christian cliches (281).

Although devastated by his political exile and determined to return to Florentine political life, Machiavelli ignores the humanist trope of self-serving flattery in his refusal to openly please Lorenzo in the Dedicatory Letter of *The Prince*. Rather than offer gifts customarily expected by a prince, Machiavelli offers his "knowledge of the actions of great men" (*The Prince* 3). This, however, does not mean that Machiavelli completely rejects the idea of attempting to appeal to his Medici reader in ways they might find rhetorically compelling. In addition to offering "knowledge", Machiavelli colors his work with terms relating to aesthetics, which would catch the eye of a Medici.

Although much of Alberti's praise as a *uomo universale* stems from Burckhardt's account in *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* published in 1860, Alberti was held in high regard by his contemporaries and was "universally acclaimed, respected, and revered" (Lefaivre 166). Anticipating Machiavelli's advice to "honor those who are excellent in an art" (*The Prince* 91), powerful rulers such as Sigismondo Malatesta, Pope Nicholas V, and Lodovico Gonzaga secured Alberti's talents as an architect whose designs had the effect of glorifying their rule through

beauty and magnificence (Lefaivre 166, 177). Alberti also had connections to the Medici. A young Lorenzo (*il magnifico)* frequently visited Alberti while in Rome and was influenced by his taste in architecture, having read his treatise several times (166). Alberti's *De re aedificatoria* was the first treatise on architecture since the writings of Vitruvius in ancient Rome, and piqued the interest of Lorenzo who "demanded that each chapter be delivered directly to him at Careggi, straight from the printing press and still unbound" (Pearson 63). In a letter written to Borso d'Este in 1484, Lorenzo declared that "he is very fond of it and reads it often" (Rykwert, "Introduction to Alberti", *On the Art of Building* xviii). Although Machiavelli's *Prince* was dedicated to the less magnificent Lorenzo, the fact that his grandfather so ardently read *De re* lends itself well to the interpretation that Machiavelli ornamented *The Prince* with echoes of Alberti's language on aesthetics as an alternative method of reeling in the attention of the Medici, being opposed to the humanist trope of flattery. There is a connection between Alberti's writings and Machiavelli's *Prince* made evident through shared terminology relating to visual art and aesthetics. The act of writing about visual art underwent a rebirth and expansion in quattrocento Florence with Alberti as the forerunner of this innovative revival, drawing inspiration from ancient Roman authors such as Vitruvius and Quintilian (Pearson 2). Reading Alberti's novel approaches in translating visual phenomena into words can aid in one's understanding of how they had a direct influence on Machiavelli and the Medici. When read closely, one finds echoes of Alberti's language of *arte* in key passages of *The Prince*.

Visual art as a defensive tool

The most obvious reference to visual art in *The Prince* is the inclusion of fortresses (83). The significance of tracing Machiavelli's discussion on fortresses in Chapter XX to Alberti and to contemporary Florence rather than to the mostly militaristic approach of Vitruvius is that it brings an alternative aesthetic interpretation of this form of architecture that the Medici would have been attuned to. Having worked as a military strategist, it makes sense for Machiavelli to include a section on fortresses as they pertain to the defense of a city and its ruler. However, contemporaries of Machiavelli would also view fortresses as an aesthetic medium (Pearson 45). Some of Italy's painters, sculptors and architects were deployed to construct fortifications and weapons, playing an important role in warcraft. As Hale indicates in *Renaissance Fortifications*:

> Florence diverted Leonardo da Vinci, recently Cesare Borgia's 'architect and engineer general,' from his work on the *Battle of Anghiari* in the Palazzo Vecchio to inspect fortifications near Pisa and to design new

ones at Piombino in 1503-4, and appointed Michelangelo in 1529 'governor and procurator general of the fortifications' of the city (13-14).

Both Da Vinci and Michelangelo worked on battlements and weapons, and Machiavelli would have seen Leonardo sketching the Arno while designing a method to flood Pisa in battle (Masters 100-101). Earlier examples include Arnolfo who, in 1334, "designed the third circuit of Florence's walls", and sculptor Andrea Pisano who "helped to complete them" (13). The overlap between defensive fortification and visual artists adds an additional interpretation to Machiavelli's advice on the art of war and statecraft. It suggests that artists can indeed serve a purpose beyond providing aesthetic pleasantries and ornamentation. They can serve to benefit the *patria*. More specifically in regards to fortresses, artists' work can be used to protect the *patria* from attack and destruction through visually persuasive means. For Alberti, beauty captured in visual art such as fortresses and buildings can be used as an effective means of deterring destruction. He writes:

[...] there is one particular quality that may greatly increase the convenience and even the life of a building. Who would not claim to dwell more comfortably between walls that are ornate, rather than neglected? What other human art might sufficiently protect a building to save it from human attack? Beauty may even influence an enemy, by restraining his anger and so preventing the work from being violated. Thus I might be so bold as to state: No other means is as effective in protecting a work from damage and human injury as is dignity and grace of form (*On the Art of Building* 6.2).

What is significant is that Alberti's approach to beauty concerns utility as much as it does aesthetic pleasantry. Aesthetics of beauty and ornamentation are being written about in a way which acknowledges a utility that goes beyond merely "art for art's sake", or defensive walls for defensive sake alone. If one reads Machiavelli's take on fortresses in this light, the protection of the work itself extends to the protection of the *patria*. To what degree and capacity depends on the *virtù* and cunningness of the prince, in this instance exemplified through the adaptation of visual art for the sake of preservation. A closer examination of the text shows that fortresses aren't the only aesthetic medium through which this can be achieved.

Establishing distance and perspective through ornament

Machiavelli begins his Dedicatory Letter to Lorenzo de Medici by drawing a clear line between "ornaments" and "knowledge" (3). The former serve the purpose of pleasing the prince to whom such gifts are brought in the hopes of "acquir[ing] [his] favour" (*grazia)*, whereas the latter serves to instruct and advise (3). Rhetorically, *The Prince* thus begins with a delineation

between aesthetic pleasures such as "horses, arms, cloth of gold, precious stones"[5], and practical knowledge attained "from long experience with modern things and a continuous reading of ancient ones" (3). If one reads Machiavelli dialectically, as Zuckert suggests one should, one finds that the Dedicatory Letter ends with a synthesis of aesthetic pleasures and practical knowledge that is not altogether obvious after a first literal reading (*Machiavelli's Politics* 23). Machiavelli claims to "have not ornamented this work, nor filled it with fulsome phrases nor with pompous and magnificent words, nor with any blandishment or superfluous ornament whatever" (*The Prince* 4). This statement should immediately be put into question as he follows it up with an analogy of an artist who sketches landscapes. Analogy and imagery are surely forms of rhetorical ornamentation, yet, the way Machiavelli uses them here goes beyond mere pleasantries. The analogy of the sketcher of landscapes and the imagery of mountainous regions serve practical ends as Machiavelli employs this use of ornamentation not to please solely but to also instruct through a method that both conceals and reveals certain knowledge. What is concealed versus what is revealed depends on who the reader is and whether they read "diligently", as Machiavelli suggests his work be read (4).

Machiavelli's writing recalls the rhetorical tactic written of by Quintilian in *Institutio Oratoria* (95 AD) and further built on by Castiglione in *Il Cortegiano* (1528): using art that conceals art to create and manipulate a desired image (Newman 15). For both Quintilian and Castiglione, this art is rooted in oration but also includes aesthetic "courtly activities" and "manner of dress" (22). The art of concealing art (or *sprezzatura* as Castiglione later calls it) serves the purpose of maintaining the image of *grazia* which can likewise be used as a "tool to gain political influence and power, and thus legitimacy" (19, 22). Whereas Quintilian focuses on the benefits this art can bestow the orator, and Castiglione the courtier, Machiavelli expresses the potential of aesthetic visual ornamentation as the concealing art that can secure the political legitimacy of a ruler and their *patria* (*The Prince* 70). According to Alberti, "ornament, rather than being inherent [such as beauty], has the character of something attached and additional" (*On the Art of Building* 6.2). What indicates Machiavelli's shift away from purely oral or written rhetoric to the lure of the visual arts is his use of visual artists who sketch landscapes, and perspective theory, in describing the necessary trait of a prince who wishes to "know well the nature of peoples" and of an advisor who wishes to "know well the nature of princes" (*The*

[5] Arms for a prince were usually ornamental, such as ornate armor and ceremonial swords.

Prince 4). The relationship between advisor and prince - between Machiavelli and Lorenzo de Medici - is likened not to the orator and their engagement with the art of oratory, but to the visual artist and their engagement with the art of drawing or sketching landscapes from a distance (4). Machiavelli frames *The Prince* with a sensitivity to the process behind ornamentation and visual artistry, and their potential relationship to practical knowledge and political rule. With regards to the aesthetics of a city, Alberti writes, "the principal ornament to any city lies in the sitting, layout, composition, and arrangement of its roads, squares, and individual works: each must be properly planned and distributed according to use, importance, and convenience" (*On the Art of Building* 7.1). Ornamentation here is presented as congruent with a carefully designed plan. This approach to ornamentation is carried forward in Machiavelli's Dedicatory Letter, where he establishes his (and the *patria*'s) position in relation to his reader. There is thus some ambiguity between ornamentation as a rhetorical strategy and ornamentation as a visual aesthetic. What remains clear, however, is Machiavelli's use of ornamentation (despite his claiming not to) to invite the reader to consider the value of more than military force and strong fortresses in a prince's rule. It is an interest in fox-like persuasion and appearances rather than force that is highlighted here.

Reading Machiavelli's sketch analogy in conjunction with Alberti's perspective theory reveals further significance pertaining to the visual component in governing a state. It also reveals an awareness and appropriation of Alberti's visual art theory which will serve to further legitimize key claims made in the third chapter of this thesis. The full passage reads as follows:

> For just as those who sketch landscapes place themselves down in the plain to consider the nature of mountains and high places and to consider the nature of low places place themselves high atop mountains, similarly, to know well the nature of peoples one needs to be prince, and to know well the nature of princes one needs to be of the people (*The Prince* 4).[6]

As previously stated, Machiavelli likens himself, and his dedicatee Lorenzo, to artists in this analogy, echoing Alberti's Prologue addressed to Filippo Brunelleschi, the architect behind the *Duomo* of Florence's Cathedral, in his Tuscan version of *De pictura*. The prologue of *De pictura* features an artist writing to a fellow artist of grand repute, a sentiment that Machiavelli perhaps felt compelled to conjure so as to call attention to Alberti's language and how he intends to add

[6] Perché cosi come coloro che disegnano e' paesi si pongono bassi nel piano a considerare la natura de' monti e de' luoghi alti e, per considerare quella de' luoghi bassi, si pongono alto sopr'a' monti, similmente, a conoscere bene la natura de' populi, bisogna essere principe, e, a conoscere bene quella de' principi, conviene essere populare (*Il principe* 22).

political significance to it. Machiavelli begins the passage with the imagery of those sketching valleys and mountains and then introduces its political counterpart, suggesting an attempt to marry the two disciplines or at the very least hint at a possible unification. I am not claiming here that *The Prince* is thus the political counterpart to *De pictura*. What is clear, however, are the nods to Alberti's work of Renaissance art theory and the attempt to apply political significance to certain aspects of it, in this case, the theory of distance and perspective. Machiavelli and Alberti share a common appreciation for the importance of aesthetic and political ideas in the formation and development of a modern Renaissance citizen and state. These nods suggest and invite a typological and tropological exercise, where additional meaning can be extracted from the passage than is evident on its face.

Let us examine the analogy further, as would have been the rhetorical custom in the Renaissance, and see what tropological insights can be gleaned. Although the theory of one-point perspective is rooted in mathematics, Alberti emphasizes that he is writing not as "a pure mathematician but only as [...] a painter" (*On Painting* 1.1). Painters, unlike mathematicians, are concerned with the "materiality" of objects - in visibility rather than conceptuality (1.1). The quantity of visibility is determined (among other factors such as light) by distance, which Alberti represents through the triangle (1.6). With distance also comes a compromise in the quality of a surface observed, for "the greater the distance, the less obscure and more blurred the surface appears" (1.7). So, the prince, like the sketcher of valleys, "sees a considerably larger part of that surface" (the people) than if he were up close. Similarly, the advisor, like the sketcher of mountains, has the prince in a wider range of visibility, being of the people. It thus becomes apparent that Machiavelli expresses through this analogy the extent to which Lorenzo's appearance is visible to the people of Florence. As a prince, one must be able to conceal through cunning and *arte* necessary cruelties that, if made visible, would invite the hatred of the people and risk the downfall of the prince. If one pursues the analogy even further, one finds that just as the artist interprets the mountains aesthetically by representing them in a sketch (*disegno*), so too does the advisor (Machiavelli), and by extension the people, visually interpret the prince (Lorenzo) aesthetically. The same is said for the prince, who must interpret the people and *patria* aesthetically. Machiavelli further hints at this in addressing his dedicatee as "the Magnificent Lorenzo de' Medici" (*The Prince* 3). In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle describes "magnificence" as "a virtue on the subject of money" that "involve[s] great expenditure" (IV. II.

1). According to Aristotle, the motive behind practicing magnificence is "for the sake of the honourable" (IV. II. 5). From the Middle Ages into the Renaissance, however, magnificence was associated with visual appearances and manifestations of authority, mainly through "large buildings and fortifications" which "were often recognized as effective means of overwhelming or intimidating a population and thereby asserting control" (Pearson 84). This was true of both ecclesiastical and secular rule. Alberti himself departs from the view of Aristotelian "magnificence" as a virtue and comes to understand it as a "euphemism for manipulation" (Smith and O'Connor 254). Therefore, in referring to Lorenzo as "your Magnificence" a total of five times in the Dedicatory Letter, Machiavelli does more than compare or contrast him to the former Lorenzo *il Magnifico*. He repeatedly conjures up the Albertian understanding of magnificence as manipulation and crosses it over with the notion of magnificence as a visual indicator of authority and legitimacy. The crafting of a prince's appearance to avoid hatred and secure legitimacy would require a visual and aesthetic concealer as a form of embellishment, which can be achieved through the cunning use of visual art. Machiavelli uses *disegno* as a metaphor but does not restrict it to solely that. By introducing the idea of *disegno*, Machiavelli hints at a more literal and practical application of the visual arts that is only made evident if one continues to read his text with a keen eye for further echoes of Albertian art theory and Florentine visual art.

***Colorire, parere, vedere,* and the aesthetic component of the fox**

In Chapter XXV, Machiavelli names a variety of modes a prince can adopt to attain "glories and riches", two of which are "violence" (*violenzia*) and "art" (*arte*) (99). Machiavelli here places "art" as the contrary of "violence" and refrains from passing a value judgement on any of these modes to emphasize his point that there is no one absolute way of meeting the goal of glory. *Arte*, whether signifying cunning artifice (*astuzia*, as the modern Italian translation indicates), skill, or visual art, is just as valid and useful as violence in commanding *fortuna* and attaining and securing glory. When read in conjunction with Chapter VII, however, it is revealed that *arte* and an appropriate form of violence (or cruelty well used) are not mutually exclusive for Machiavelli, as the ideal prince must be able to use both as the circumstances demand.

Necessary cruelty and violence can be concealed behind a visually satisfying and stupefying medium and thus be rendered well used, for it would deter a reaction of hatred from the people, such as Cesare's display of Remirro's corpse. To avoid hatred a prince must above all

abstain from being "rapacious and a usurper of the property and the women of his subjects" (*The Prince* 72). In addition to this advice, Machiavelli in Chapter XVIII expresses visually oriented methods through which a prince can actively avoid hatred and garner praise from others. The chapter emphasizes the importance of a prince's appearance in maintaining a level of legitimacy in the eyes of the people. Machiavelli gets this message across through the repetition of words such as *colorire* (color), *parere* (appear), and *vedere* (see), ultimately intersecting them with the notion of the cunning fox. After introducing the metaphor of the lion and the fox, Machiavelli expresses the inevitability of acting dishonestly in the face of dishonesty, and the importance of manipulating the interpretive vision and opinion of citizens that a prince has to recognize:

> Nor does a prince ever lack legitimate causes to color his failure to observe faith. One could give infinite modern examples of this, and show how many peace treaties and promises have been rendered invalid and vain through the infidelity of princes; and the one who has known best how to use the fox has come out best. But it is necessary to know well how to color this nature, and to be a great pretender and dissembler; and men are so simple and so obedient to present necessities that he who deceives will always find someone who will let himself be deceived (69-70).[7]

The use of the word *colorire* as opposed to alternatives like "hide" or "obscure" indicates a performative action set on revealing a desired image rather than a sole concern for concealing the prince's "nature". It again calls back to Quintilian's theory of art concealing art and anticipates Castiglione's *sprezzatura*. In painting, color conceals a surface through its revealing of a new one. When Alberti writes of colors in *De pictura*, he explains their function in rendering a painting or image visually graceful:

> I would like that the kinds of colors and, as far as it is possible, that all species, be contemplated with a certain grace and agreeableness. Grace, without doubt, will result when colors will be combined with colors with a certain accurate diligence [...] This combination of colors, in fact, will certainly make more lovely both beauty, starting from variety, and splendor, starting from comparison. Well, there is certainly some bond among colors in the way that one, with respect to the other, increases the grace and beauty of the adjacent [color] (2.48).

If one considers Alberti's discourse on colors when reading Machiavelli's statement that a prince never lacks "legitimate causes to color his failure to observe faith" and that "it is necessary to know well how to color this nature", one comes to interpret the suggestion that a prince's cruel actions can appear as acts of grace when properly "colored". The aesthetic implications of this

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[7] [...] né mai a uno principe mancorno cagioni legittime di colorire la inosservanzia. Di questo se ne potrebbe dare infiniti esempli moderni e mostrare quante pace, quante promisse sono state fatte *irrite* e vane per la infedeltà de' principi: e quello che ha saputo meglio usare la golpe, è meglio capitato. Ma e necessario questa natura saperla bene colorire ed essere gran simulatore e dissimulatore: e sono tanto semplici gli uomini, e tanto ubbidiscono alle necessità presenti, che colui che inganna troverrà sempre chi si lascerà ingannare (*Il principe* 146).

cannot be ignored. Using the fox thus becomes analogous with using "color" to conceal the nature of princes and reveal an embellished, and, as the term "grace" suggests, god-like quality. This interpretation further solidifies the significance of the Dedicatory Letter's *disegno* analogy as serving to illustrate the visual relationship between the members of the *patria* and the prince. It is a relationship that can be secured and perpetuated through sublimely aesthetic means.

The idea of "color" contributing to a visual enhancement of grace is further pursued as Machiavelli provides the example of Pope Alexander VI immediately following the passage highlighted above. Alexander VI could appear to have and bestow grace upon others by virtue of his title as God's representative on earth, a quality that his son Cesare Borgia was associated with but had no legitimate claim to. Machiavelli claims that he does "not want to be silent about one of the recent examples [Alexander VI]", yet his brief inclusion of the pope (merely two sentences) suggests that some silence is appropriate as to the significance of Alexander's relation to the chapter's theme (70). Typologically, Alexander VI can be linked to his son Cesare and to the sublime power of God and the church. He was, however, also a patron of the arts. Alexander VI commissioned the painting of frescoes by Bernardino Pinturicchio in private rooms of the Vatican's Apostolic Palace (today known as the Borgia Apartments), such as the *Sala degli Arti Liberali* and the *Sala dei Santi* (Poeschel 146, 150). In addition to Pinturicchio, the Borgia pope employed Bramante, Raphael and Michelangelo during a period that saw a reinvigoration of architectural style in Rome. He also "took a great interest" in "theatrical representations" and in public festivities like the *Carnevale* (Pastor 124). Alexander VI was a corrupt and ruthless pope who nevertheless had an appreciation for the beauty of art - something that could appear as a saving grace for the pope's questionable behavior in regards to Catholic tradition. Therefore, when Machiavelli states that "his deceits succeeded at his will, because he well knew this aspect of the world" (*nondimeno sempre gli succederno gl'inganni* ad votum*, perché conosceva bene questa parte del mondo*), a double meaning is likely intended (*The Prince* 70). The "aspect of the world" well known by Alexander VI could be interpreted simply as the inherently bad nature of the human spirit that a prince must be prepared to deal with, indicated in the modern Italian translation as "*questo aspetto dell'animo umano"* (*Il Principe* 147). Alternatively, the original "*questa parte del mondo*" may indicate a particular aspect of the contemporary world through which these quattro and cinquecento rulers operated and perpetuated a glorious and graceful image. Keeping with the theme of the chapter, "this aspect of the world" can refer to the

political, religious, and social culture entrenched in visual art and aesthetically charged appearances. This alternative meaning, hidden within the silences of the passage, ties Alexander VI, the church, and Cesare Borgia by association to the use of the fox through aesthetic means.

Chapter XVIII ends with repeated verbal cues hinting at Machiavelli's understanding and use of *arte* as an effective medium in concealing necessary cruelties likened to the lion by revealing feigned agreeable appearances. They are as follows (emphasis added):

> Thus, it is not necessary for a prince to have all the above-mentioned qualities in fact, but it is indeed necessary to *appear* to have them. Nay, I dare say this, that by having them and always observing them, they are harmful; and by *appearing* to have them, they are useful, as it is to *appear* merciful, faithful, humane, honest, and religious, and to be so; but to remain with a spirit built so that, if you need not to be those things, you are able and know how to change to the contrary (70).[8]

> A prince should thus take great care that nothing escape his mouth that is not full of the above-mentioned five qualities and that, to *see* him and hear him, he should *appear* all mercy, all faith, all honesty, all humanity, all religion. And nothing is more necessary to *appear* to have than this last quality. Men in general *judge more by their eyes* than by their hands, because *seeing is given to everyone*, touching to few. Everyone *sees how you appear*, few touch what you are; and these few dare not oppose the opinion of many, who have the majesty of the state to defend them; and in the actions of all men, and especially of princes, where there is no court to appeal to, one looks to the end. So let a prince win and maintain his state: the means will always be judged honorable, and will be praised by everyone. For the vulgar are taken in by the *appearance* and outcome of a thing, and in the world there is no one but the vulgar (70-71).[9]

What is stated in these passages confirms that which was merely hinted at in the Dedicatory Letter. Machiavelli is telling his Medici readership and prospective employers that he understands their aesthetic approach to political rule as a form of manipulation and deceit, a method that works because people in general are "taken in by the appearance [...] of a thing" (*The Prince* 71). He affirms that he is indeed judging Lorenzo (and the Medici in general) aesthetically, as was hinted at in the Dedicatory Letter, and highlights the cunning manipulation

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[8] A uno principe adunque non è necessario avere in fatto tutte le soprascritte qualità, ma è bene necessario *parere* di averle; anzi ardirò di dire questo: che, avendole e osservandole sempre, sono dannose, e, *parendo* di averle, sono utili; come *parere* piatoso, fedele, umano, intero, religioso, ed essere: ma stare in modo edificato con lo animo che, bisognando non essere, tu possa e sappia diventare il contrario (*Il Principe* 146-148).

[9] Debbe adunque uno principe avere gran cura che non gli esca mai di bocca cosa che non sia piena delle soprascritte cinque qualità; e paia, a udirlo e *vederlo*, tutto piatà, tutto fede, tutto integrità, tutto umanità, tutto religione: e non è cosa più necessaria a *parere* di avere, che questa ultima qualità. E li uomini in universali *iudicano più alli occhi* che alle mani; perché *tocca a vedere a ognuno*, a sentire a pochi: ognuno *vede quello che tu pari*, pochi sentono quello che tu se'; e quelli pochi non ardiscono opporsi alla opinione di molti che abbino la maestà dello stato che gli difenda; e nelle azioni di tutti li uomini, e massime de' principi, dove non è iudizio a chi reclamare, si guarda al fine.

Facci dunque uno principe di vincere e mantenere lo stato: e' mezzi sempre fieno iudicati onorevoli e da ciascuno saranno laudati; perché el vulgo ne va preso con quello che *pare* e con lo evento della cosa: e nel mondo non è se non vulgo (*Il Principe* 148).

of appearances as a potential means of securing legitimacy in the eyes of the people and of foreign rulers, who would frequently visit Florence and the Medici's private quarters on matters of diplomacy and were thus predisposed to viewing their aesthetic magnificence. This is clearly exemplified in the fifteen-year-old Galeazzo Maria Sforza's interaction with Gozzoli's *Journey of the Magi to Bethlehem* frescoes in the Medici Chapel in 1459. The frescoes offered the son of the Duke of Milan a spot amongst the prominent political actors, insinuated through the depiction of "two unfinished figures" who "were destined to be portraits of powerful nobles" - one of which would be the young Sforza himself (Lee 146). Sent to Florence on a diplomatic mission by his father, Galeazzo Maria's viewing of the *Magi* frescoes was no accident. Although meetings of this nature were usually held in the larger public rooms of the palace, a conscious decision was made on the part of Cosimo de Medici to have Galeazzo Maria wait for him in the family's small private chapel housing Gozzoli's magnificent and sublime frescoes (145). In addition to offering the soon-to-be Duke a spot within the web of powerful rulers alongside the Medici, the *Magi* frescoes displayed a political message that would have struck Sforza with amazement and unquestionable certainty - the Medici were the legitimate heirs to Florentine rule (153). Apart from Cosimo's humble representation, the colorful, ornate, and aesthetically captivating portrayal of the succeeding members of the Medici family riding alongside other legitimate political rulers, as well as the three biblical Kings in procession towards the newborn Christ (one of which, Caspar, is portrayed by a young Lorenzo *il Magnifico*), served to elevate the family's glory and legitimacy in the eyes of powerful foreign leaders and insinuate their upcoming dynastic rule. The aesthetic appearance of religion was but a frame that would be repurposed to accentuate the power and glory of secular rule. As Lee puts it, "the *Journey of the Magi to Bethlehem* was transforming a biblical story into a glorification of the Medici's wealth and power" (146). It serves as an example of art that meant to conceal the "illegal, immoral and frequently violent means by which [powerful families like the Sforzas and Medici] had risen to prominence" (Lee 161). Machiavelli's push for the more public *Battle of Anghiari* fresco to elevate Florence's glorious appearance years later indicates that he acted on his own advice and belief in the persuasive power of the visual arts.

Machiavelli understands that people can be swayed by what they see. Visual components, or the *arte* of appearances, are thus persuasive rhetorical tools in Florentine politics according to Machiavelli. Whether visual appearances are considered as more persuasive than the art of

speech is difficult to say, as it is not *hearing* that Machiavelli contrasts "seeing" with, but rather "touching" (*sentire*). According to Viroli, sight and touch are expressions that allude to a type of knowledge that requires a certain level of proximity and cannot be obtained by looking at things from a great distance (*La redenzione dell'Italia* II.3). Machiavelli distinguishes between the two, and considers "touch" a superior path to knowledge. In order for one to understand the realities of political life, one must be able to judge with one's hands (*alle mani)* rather than with one's eyes (*alli occhi*) - that is, judge actions rather than appearances, what *is* rather than what *seems* to be (II.3). As a prince, however, it is crucial to maintain the appearance of traditional virtues while acting according to necessity, for this constitutes the *arte* of cunning and deception that Machiavelli claims can be used to secure power and legitimacy in the eyes of the *vulgo*. Just as the notion of ornament implies "something attached and additional" that can both reveal and conceal an image or surface to the eye, so must a prince add some visual ornamentation to his rule in order to conceal any necessary cruelties done for the good of the *patria* (Alberti, *On the Art of Building* 6.2). One way to deceptively display such virtues as mercy, faith, humanity, honesty, and religiosity is through the cultivation of the visual arts.

There is an implied sense of artisanal craftiness in the concepts of sight and touch. Alberti writes that a painter "imitate[s] by hand objects he has conceived with the mind" (*On Painting*, 1.24). Good painting involves a "deep understanding" of objects depicted which goes beyond mere sight (1.23). This "deep understanding" may be likened to Machiavelli's "touch" (*sentire*), as it too signifies an understanding of how things are rather than simply of how they appear. The mere act of "seeing" (*vedere*) is left to the less skilled spectators of an artwork. According to Alberti, painting "is equally agreeable both to the learned and the uncultured, something that does not occur in almost any other art, as it is true that it attracts the experts and it is also good to move the unskilled" (2.28). Paintings "move the unskilled" through their appearances which, again, both serve to conceal and reveal. The parallels between Machiavelli and Alberti's rhetoric, coupled with the Medici's history of patronage, should lead one to read the passage on appearances as inclusive of practical advice given on account of the use of visual art. The *vulgo*, like the "uncultured" and "unskilled", are taken by appearances whereas the few understand the realities embellished by visual concealers. Machiavelli counts himself in with the few here, thus indicating his understanding of this aspect of Florentine culture and politics popularized and propelled by the Medici.

The appearance of religion

Out of all the virtues listed, Machiavelli claims "religion" as the most necessary quality "to appear to have" (*The Prince* 70). Machiavelli does not specify what religion he means, so it may be understood as a general sense of divine devotion. The inclusion of "religion" in the context of "appearances" should prompt the diligent reader to consider their relationship in Renaissance Italy. Aesthetic magnificence, sublime authority, and religion often went hand in hand. The opulence of the Vatican and grandiosity of the *Duomo* in Florence are indicators of the symbiotic relationship between claims to divinity and a visual aesthetic. Alberti expresses the notion that a similar sentiment prevailed in ancient times as he claims "Trismegistus, a very ancient writer, maintains that painting and sculpture were born together with religion" (*On Painting* 2.27). The fine arts of painting, sculpture and architecture contributed to the bolstering of what was once considered by Augustine to be an idolatrous sin (I.iii-v). Breaking away from this mostly Medieval mindset, religious leaders during the Renaissance defended the papacy's appropriation of divine magnificence through artworks and architecture - with the obvious exception of Savonarola, whose rule of Florence saw to the destruction of several works of art seen as heretical and idolatrous.[10] For example, Pope Nicholas V, to whom Alberti dedicates *De re aedificatoria*, argued that his extensive building projects and art patronage in Rome were done in the interest of maintaining God's (and the church's) supreme authority and preserving the Catholic faith (Pearson 157). The following excerpt from Pearson's *Humanism and the Urban World* expresses Gianozzo Manetti's account of Nicholas V's deathbed speech, where he justifies his opulent approach to religious rule:

> The minds of ordinary people, [Nicholas V] argued, are fickle and inconstant. When they hear learned men explain to them the legitimacy of the church's supreme authority, they will be persuaded - but only for a short time. Later, their belief, based on shallow foundations, will begin to fade away. For this reason, the church must have recourse to large and impressive buildings, ones that look eternal, as though they were built by God. Such sights will serve daily to reinforce the faith in the minds of those who see them (157).

Although Alberti critiques this coercive approach, he nevertheless argues for something similar when he writes:

> What remarkable importance our ancestors, men of great prudence, attached to it [beauty] is shown by the care they took that their legal, military, and religious institutions - indeed, the whole commonwealth - should be much embellished; and by their letting it be known that if all these institutions, without which

[10] Savonarola took an alternative approach to magnificence. His "bonfire of the vanities" relied on a spectacle-oriented approach to divine devotion bent on the destruction of pagan and secular art.

man could scarce exist, were to be stripped of their pomp and finery, their business would appear insipid and shabby (*On the Art of Building* 6.2).

For Alberti, the embellishment of the city through the beauty and ornament of visual *arte* can help preserve the existence of its institutions and deter violence and destruction. This deterrence does not necessitate the type of excessive opulence supported by Nicholas V according to Alberti, who favors beauty over magnificence (Pearson 157). This point of view is likely shared by Machiavelli, as indicated in his critique of Cosimo de Medici's over reliance on liberality expressed through self-glorifying opulence in *Florentine Histories*.[11] However, if this is the case, then "beauty" would be replaced with the sublime, which, as will be shown in the following chapter, does not depend on opulence in order to garner a response of satisfaction and stupefaction from its spectators. Machiavelli's thoughts on the visual embellishments of the city are not as directly stated, but his emphasis on religion as the most important quality for a prince to visually project suggests an understanding of the persuasive potential of religious and divine iconography in initiating and securing the support of the people. Religion, unlike the other qualities Machiavelli names, supports an aesthetic that inspires both fear and love, or rather awe, and thus lends itself well to the theory of the political sublime.

The semblance of divine power is not only projected through architecture but can be represented in the smaller scale medium of painting. Alberti writes, "painting certainly has in itself a truly divine power" and "has been enormously useful to religious sentiment - through which we are joined in a particular way to the gods - and to preserve minds with a certain intact devotion" (*On Painting* 2.25). Alberti expresses the view that painting can serve as a path to immortality for those people or events depicted, or at the very least extend the memory of those depicted in the minds of the viewers (2.25). He furthermore claims that, like architecture, painting too can function as a deterrent to the violence and destruction of a city: "One says that the king Demetrius did not burn down Rhodes in order to avoid destroying a panel by Protogenes. We can affirm therefore that Rhodes was saved from [its] enemies thanks to a single picture" (2.27). One gets a hint of the awareness of the political potential of art in this statement by Alberti that only further develops in Machiavelli's depiction of Borgia's sublime *spettacolo*, where the visual effect of Remirro's corpse acts as a deterrent to the hatred and potential

[11] For more on Machiavelli's representation of Cosimo in *Florentine Histories*, read "Machiavelli's Imagination of Excellent Men: An Appraisal of the Lives of Cosimo and Castruccio Castracani" by Joseph C. Macfarland.

violence and disunion of the people - it is a medium through which tumult can be eased (*The Prince* 30). Applying these Albertian insights to Machiavelli's insistence on color, appearances, and religion as components that constitute fox-like cunning reveals an appreciation of the use of aesthetics for political persuasion in Machiavelli's work. *Arte* may thus be understood as deception advanced through aesthetic means which, for Machiavelli, can help bestow legitimacy and glory to a prince's rule and to the *patria* if properly used and imitated in the face of tumult.

Imitazione* and *disegno

In chapter VI of *The Prince*, Machiavelli introduces the concept of *imitazione* as essential for a prince who wishes to achieve the greatness and glory of past exemplars. Although lacking in direct references to the visual arts, this chapter evokes typologies from Alberti's *De pictura*, continuing the motif set up in the Dedicatory Letter. Alberti ends book I of *De Pictura*, which has focused on the technicalities and "first foundations of art to inexperienced painters", with a statement emphasizing the necessity of having a "deep understanding" of objects if one is to depict them accurately and be a "good painter" (1.23). This "deep understanding", facilitated through an awareness and understanding of perspective theory, is a prerequisite for proper *imitazione*. It is through *imitazione* that "painting [...] aspires to represent the objects seen" (2.30). Mimesis is thus a central virtuous axiom for both Machiavelli and Alberti, and concerns itself with what is visible to the eye. Machiavelli once again adds political significance to a concept relating to aesthetics with his call to imitate the "most excellent" exemplars, Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus (*The Prince* 22).

The four exemplars Machiavelli calls on to imitate have no strong basis in reality[12], yet they nevertheless represent universalizable characteristics (universalizable to the extent of being applicable to founders and princes), making it easier to imitate them. Even Borgia, who according to historical accounts did not live up to Machiavelli's qualities of the best leader nor to his own ambitions, is largely re-imagined and embellished in *The Prince.* Alberti writes that "it is impossible to correctly imitate what does not, without interruption, maintain the same aspect

[12] Although Cyrus was not a mythological or biblical figure, Machiavelli's reading of Cyrus comes from Xenophon's embellished history. This notion is indicated when Machiavelli writes, at the end of Chapter XIV, "And whoever reads the life of Cyrus written of by Xenophon will then recognize in the life of Scipio how much glory that imitation brought him, how much in chastity, affability, humanity, and liberality Scipio conformed to what had been written of Cyrus by Xenophon" (*The Prince* 60). Machiavelli twice refers to Cyrus's life as "written of by Xenophon", thus diminishing the full veracity of Cyrus as he actually was while emphasizing Cyrus as he was understood and portrayed by the Athenian historian.

of itself toward him who paints. Hence it follows that things depicted by others are more easily imitable than those sculpted, because [the depicted] always conserve the same aspect" (*On Painting* 2.31). Machiavelli appears to take heed of this concern. The exemplars from Chapter VI are mythological and biblical figures who display important practical traits and virtues and remain one dimensional. Machiavelli's representations of Moses, Cyrus, Romulus and Theseus are "more easily imitable" than their three-dimensional counterparts because he has specifically framed and isolated what about them deserves imitation. Machiavelli highlights their founding of "new orders and modes", their role as "armed prophets", and most importantly, "the opportunity, which gave them the matter enabling them to introduce any form they pleased" (*The Prince* 23-24). He does so in the way a painter would select the most telling aspect of a subject's personality and attributes in a painting. There may not appear to be anything particularly "aesthetic" about these qualities and features, yet one cannot ignore the visual implications of *imitazione*. Mimesis involves "the imitation of nature", as stated by Ceninni (1390), and Alberti's perspective theory allows for the faithful reproduction of that nature which is visible to the eye (Procaccini 32). This differs slightly from classical notions of mimesis, which, according to Aristotle, served an edifying purpose and "was not simply an imitation of "nature," but more specifically, a representation of an *ethos*, that is, an imitation of how nature operates" (Procaccini 33). Alberti's inclusion of geometrical and mathematical axioms in the observation of nature allows not only for the comprehension but also for the visual perception of nature (33). *Imitazione* as a visual and aesthetic process was likewise a concern in the Renaissance *paragone*. As "competitive comparisons among the arts of poetry, painting, sculpture, and music", the *paragone* consisted of arguments geared toward proving which art form best served its purpose of imitation (Dundas 66). Dundas sums up the *paragone* as follows:

> For the issue is imitation. Every instance of the paragone reveals the same preoccupation with the ability of the arts to imitate nature as the prerequisite for moving people and thereby reaching their understanding. To find the means of expression is therefore essential (89).

To imitate nature was to imitate God, since according to Leonardo da Vinci and Castiglione, two frequent debaters in the *paragone*, "God was […] a great painter" (Dundas 87). Renaissance theories of mimesis, therefore, are particularly favorable to the visual and aesthetic component of the virtue of *imitazione* over its Aristotelian functional component.

One finds further hints of this interpretation of *imitazione* as aesthetic in Machiavelli's analogy of the bow and arrow, which Alberti also evokes at the end of book I of *De pictura*.

Writing of the "prudent man who should always enter upon the paths beaten by great men", Machiavelli states:

> He should do as prudent archers do when the place they plan to hit appears too distant, and knowing how far the strength of their bow carries, they set their aim much higher than the place intended, not to reach such height with their arrow, but to be able with the aid of so high an aim to achieve their plan (22).[13]

Two significant points are in need of consideration with respect to this passage. One is the similarity to Alberti's closing of book I, where he declares "he who attempts to depict objects without a deep understanding of them will never become a good painter. One draws the bow in vain, in fact, if you have not established where to direct the arrow" (1.23). For both Machiavelli and Alberti, the analogy of the bow and arrow appears in their respective sections introducing the concept of *imitazione*. Second is the use of the terms *desegnano* and *disegno* which call back to the Dedicatory Letter's sketching analogy. Although *disegno* is translated here as "plan" in both verb and noun, *disegnano* refers specifically to drawing or sketching in the Dedicatory Letter. *Disegno* can be read as literally meaning a "plan", but one would be hasty to ignore the aesthetic definition of *disegno* as "sketch" or "drawing" as also bearing significance in this passage. Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455), best known for his work on the bronze doors of Florence's Baptistry, considered *disegno* "the origin and fundament of every art" (Keizer 311). In Renaissance Florence, *disegno* also connoted a typically aesthetic "sense of judgement and order" (311). The "plan" or *disegno* in Machiavelli's text is achieved through *imitazione*. Diligent and ready *imitazione* is of the utmost importance to Alberti when it comes to practicing the arts of sculpture and painting:

> Whether you practice painting finally or [practice] sculpture, it is necessary that you always set yourself some elegant and particular model that you both gaze at and imitate; and in imitating it, I think that one needs to adopt diligence connected with readiness; so that the painter never directs the brush or the stylus to the work without first having established, in the best way with the mind, what he will have to do and in what way he will have to carry it out to the end (*On Painting* 3.59).

Much of Alberti's rhetoric concerning the *virtù* of the visual artist aligns itself with Machiavelli's rhetoric on the *virtù* of the prince. *Imitazione*, when done with "diligence connected with readiness" helps an artist carry out their plan, or *disegno*, "to the end" (3.59). It is very much in this way that Machiavelli expects the prince to imitate past exemplars and "achieve their plan"

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[13] [...] e fare come gli arcieri prudenti, a' quali parendo el luogo dove desegnano ferire troppo lontano, e conoscendo fino a quanto va la virtù del loro arco, pongono la mira assai più alta che il luogo destinato, non per aggiugnere con la loro freccia a tanta altezza, ma per potere con lo aiuto di sì alta mira pervenire al disegno loro (*Il principe* 56).

(*pervenire al disegno loro*). A prince should be "prudent" but also ready to seize "opportunity, which gave [the exemplars] the matter enabling them to introduce any form they pleased" (*The Prince* 22, 23). These echoes of visual art and visual art theory become more literal and practical when read in conjunction with Machiavelli's advice on the crafting and manipulation of appearances as a means of securing the favor of the people. Machiavelli's adoption of the visual aesthetics of *imitazione* become even more apparent in his call to imitate Borgia's use of aesthetics in his sublime *spettacolo*.

Architettore, edifizio* and *fortezze

Whereas Chapter VI of *The Prince* ties political *virtù* to *imitazione*, Chapter VII focuses on *fortuna*. An Albertian echo in chapter VII is suggested in Machiavelli's analogy of the "architect" and his "building" in a chapter emphasizing the malignant forces of *fortuna* working against even the admirable and imitable *virtù* of Borgia:

> On the other hand Cesare Borgia, called Duke Valentino by the vulgar, acquired his state through the fortune of his father and lost it through the same, notwithstanding the fact that he made use of every deed and did all those things that should be done by a prudent and virtuous man to put roots in the states that the arms and fortune of others had given him. For, as was said above, whoever does not lay his foundations at first might be able, with great virtue, to lay them later, although they might have to be laid with hardship for the architect and with danger to the building (*The Prince* 27).[14]

In *De re aedificatoria*, Alberti expresses concerns with the potential "destructive forces" that threaten the *firmitas*, or durability, of architectural creations (Pearson 39). He writes of "ruinous torrents of rain and swirling floods" that "[undermine] the whole strength of the building and "[bring] ruin and destruction on the entire work" (*On the Art of Building* 1.4, 1.11). His language depicts nature as an opposing force to the virtue of the architect, much like *fortuna* is set up as the opposer of *virtù* in chapter VII of *The Prince* through the depiction of Cesare Borgia's rise and fall, introduced with the analogy of the architect and building. A Medici reader familiar with Alberti's treatise on architecture would notice the associative language Machiavelli uses in his inclusion of yet another visual art-oriented analogy of the *architettore* and *edifizio* paired with the looming preoccupation of the destructive nature of *fortuna* apparent in Alberti's work. Aspects of visual art were in Machiavelli's time tied to both offensive and defensive mechanisms

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[14] Da l'altra parte, Cesare Borgia, chiamato dal vulgo duca Valentino, acquisitò lo stato con la fortuna del padre e con quella lo perdé, non ostante che per lui si usassi ogni opera e facessi tutte quelle cose che per uno prudente e virtuoso uomo si doveva fare per mettere le barbe sua in quelli stati che l'arme e fortuna di altri gli aveva concessi. Perché, come di sopra si disse, chi non fa e' fondamenti prima, gli potrebbe con una grande virtù farli poi, ancora che si faccino con disagio dello architettore e periculo dello edifizio (*ll principe*, 64).

in the context of war. When looking at causes of internal strife (i.e., the hatred of the people), Machiavelli seems to hint at the potential for *arte* in deterring or acting as a defensive barrier against the fomenting of popular hatred. When one thinks of the ways in which Machiavelli advises a prince to avoid hatred (and thus command an element of *fortuna*), one should be led back to the cruel, swift and aesthetic methods of Cesare Borgia, the exemplar set up as the most worthy of *imitazione* in *The Prince*. His tactics can be considered as *arte,* or more specifically, cunning.

Architettore and *edifizio* are set up as analogies for the prince and the state in Chapter VII, but that does not mean that there is an absence of practical advice on the proper use of this visual art form. In Chapter XX, the theme of architecture is revisited through a discussion on the use of fortresses. Here, one finds further links to *De re aedificatoria*. One is Machiavelli's declaration that he will not judge the use of fortresses as better or worse than the lack of them. Towards the end of the chapter he states, "Fortresses are thus useful or not according to the times, and if they do well for you in one regard, they hurt you in another" (86). Claiming that "the best fortress there is, is not to be hated by the people", he ends the chapter by giving two examples of the Countess of Forli, Caterina Sforza's, experience with fortresses. The first saw her benefit from the use of them, whereas the second involves Cesare Borgia's successful attack on Forli and the Countess. Alberti takes a similar position in his text when he writes "we will side neither with those who want their city to be defencelessly naked nor with those who put all their hopes in the structure of the walls" (*On the Art of Building* 4.3). Alberti follows this up with a reference to Plato's thought that a city will inevitably be faced with conquest due to humans' natural "desire for possession" and "ambition" (4.3). Alberti blames the threat set against cities on human avarice, a point of view shared with Christian theology, most noticeably in the Fall (Pearson 44). Machiavelli instead places the blame on the prince's failure at curbing the hatred of the people, thus replacing Plato and the Bible's reasoning with his own as he does when he advocates for the "effectual truth" of politics over "what is imagined" (*The Prince* 61).

Machiavelli claims that "if the people hold you in hatred fortresses do not save [a prince]" (*The Prince* 87). If the "fortress" is read both as a literal mechanism of defense and a form of visual *arte*, one comes to the realization that Machiavelli favors its aesthetic component over its purely militaristic one. The use of an armed citizen militia (or the use of the lion) is a necessary but insufficient means for securing glory and legitimacy if the citizens are not armed

with belief in, and veneration for, their ruler and *patria*. Such belief, inspired by the ruler's use of visual acts of cunning (the use of the fox), is what secures a ruler's desired political outcomes. When Machiavelli writes, "I shall praise whoever makes fortresses and whoever does not, and I shall blame anyone who, trusting in fortresses, thinks little of being hated by the people", he praises both those who are and are not involved in the "making" of fortresses (87). A Renaissance mind would be drawn to the emphasis on "making" here; on the construction - the creative process - behind fortresses, extending to the fortress' association with the visual arts. Fortresses are not "made" by princes but by artists and architects. It is possible then, that Machiavelli praises both the architect ("whoever makes fortresses") and the prince who commissions them ("whoever does not"). Blame is reserved for those who "trust in fortresses" while not taking the people's views and emotions into serious consideration. The "making" of fortresses, coupled with a prince's awareness of visual aesthetics as a means of deterring hatred, is praiseworthy for Machiavelli. The trust in fortresses as merely structures that could keep a prince safe from his people's disapproval is a tactic warranting reproach. The thought of avoiding the hatred of the people should direct the reader's attention back to Cesare Borgia and his aesthetically charged sublime spectacle in Cesena which had the effect of securing the stupefaction and satisfaction of the people and averted any hatred towards the Duke. The careful reader familiar with the language of the visual arts is thus led back to Chapter VII, where the art of architecture was first mentioned.

In concluding his chapter on fortresses with the statement that a prince must guard above all against the hatred of the people, Machiavelli indirectly ties the people's hatred to *fortuna,* and the proper preventative measures against such hatred to *virtù*. When he later likens *fortuna* to both a woman who needs to be violently commanded and a river that can be contained with the construction of "dikes and dams" in Chapter XXV, he expresses two ways of overcoming *fortuna*: through offense *and* strategic defense (*The Prince* 98, 101). These may more appropriately be labeled, in Machiavellian terms, the use of the lion and fox, the latter of which is most effective through the crafting and manipulation of appearances. *Edifizio* and *fortezze* are thus congruent with the aesthetic components of the fox. Presenting the *architettore* and *edifizio*'s role in guarding against *fortuna* alongside Borgia's tactics in guarding himself and his acquired state against the hatred of the people invites the reader to consider Borgia's most exemplary tactic as an act of aesthetic cunning rather than one of brute force.

The aesthetic art of war

Machiavelli writes in Chapter XIV that "a prince should have no other object, nor any other thought, nor take anything else as his art but that of war and its orders and discipline" (*Debbe dunque uno principe non avere altro obietto né altro pensiero né prendere cosa alcuna per sua arte, fuora della guerra e ordini e disciplina di essa)* (*The Prince* 58). Machiavelli's declaration of this "art of war" being "the only art which is of concern to one who commands" (*perché quella e sola arte che si aspetta a chi comanda*) may cause some to protest my claims of Machiavelli's sensitivity to the political utility of visual art (58). However, what it rather indicates is the broad definition Machiavelli places on *arte*. To be sure, it is not only the art of war, but the art of its "order and discipline" that Machiavelli calls for, which can be developed with the use of sublime visual art since the art of war emphasizes the cultivation of a citizen army. An effective way of getting the people on the prince's side and willing to fight for him is being held in high esteem. Machiavelli suggests that if a prince wants to be held in high esteem "he should honor those who are excellent in an art" (*onorando gli eccellenti in una arte*) and "at suitable times of the year, keep the people occupied with festivals and spectacles" (*Debbe oltre a questo, ne' tempi convenienti dello anno, tenere occupati e' populi con feste e spettaculi*) (*The Prince* 91). The "art of war", therefore, can be inclusive of the use of the visual arts.

Machiavelli once again here links the role of the prince to the role of the artist. Echoing Alberti's sentiments that a good painter must gain a deep understanding of nature and of their surroundings, Machiavelli claims that to master the art of war, a prince "should always be out hunting, and through this accustom the body to hardships; should learn the nature of sites, and recognize how mountains rise, how valleys open up, how plains lie, and understand the nature of rivers and marshes - and in this invest the greatest care" (*The Prince* 59). Rather than only focus on the violent and aggressive nature of the lion, Machiavelli sheds light on - and very likely emphasizes as most important ("and in this invest the greatest care") - tactics likened to the fox. The fox-like component of the art of war is given an aesthetic edge. The prince should understand the visual aspects of his *patria*. Like the Dedicatory Letter, this passage expresses the notion that the prince should interpret politics, war, and the *patria* aesthetically, and in turn proceed to rule aesthetically through the *use* of artists and their artworks for political ends.

The chapter concludes with a return to the motif of *imitazione* which, read through an Albertian perspective, should be understood as a visual and aesthetic process. *Imitazione* is

shown to bring glory here, just as in Chapter VI. Concepts like glory and legitimacy are therefore upheld by an act of *sprezzatura*. They necessitate a relationship between the viewers and the *arte* by which the prince chooses to conceal his cruelties and reveal his magnificence. Lorenzo in the Dedicatory Letter is set up to be interpreted and understood aesthetically through Machiavelli's reference to perspective theory. Although the *vulgo* would judge him purely based on what appears, Machiavelli indicates that he understands the nature of princes, and thus sees through his *sprezzatura* - he is able to *touch* Lorenzo and the Medici, not simply *see* them. Machiavelli expresses this while partaking in his own form of *sprezzatura*. He does not outright claim that the visual arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture serve a political purpose in cinquecento politics, but rather conceals this message through his own literary cunning, perhaps in order to preserve this effectual truth and keep to his "intent [...] to write something useful to *whoever understands*" (*The Prince* 61, emphasis added). Lorenzo may not be Machiavelli's ideal reader, as is indicated when he writes "If your Magnificence considers and reads it diligently" (4). The conditional "if" indicates there is no guarantee Lorenzo will read it diligently or fully understand it, however, Machiavelli's rhetoric of *arte*'s place in Florentine politics adds to the argument that Medici readership was intended, and to them his understanding of *arte* would be revealed.

Chapter 3

Borgia's *spettacolo* as a work of sublime visual *arte*

"If in Christ's cross we consider the point of view and intention of those who did not believe in Him, it will appear as His shame: but if we consider its effect, which is our salvation, it will appear as endowed with Divine power, by which it triumphed over the enemy"

- Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae: The adoration of Christ (Tertia Pars, Q.25, Article 4)

While the intent of the previous chapter was to portray a general view of Machiavelli's understanding and use of *arte* in *The Prince*, this final chapter focuses on *arte* as a means of gaining political legitimacy and glory. Machiavelli's representation of Borgia's *spettacolo* in Chapter VII of *The Prince* helps to contextualize *arte*, and its relation to Christian iconography, as a vehicle for the political sublime. Machiavelli's description of the scene of Remirro's corpse can be best understood if read as an *ekphrasis* of a painting with devotional implications. As was previously shown, Machiavelli intersects the concepts of religion, cunning, and aesthetics in his statement that a prince should make use of the appearance of religion (*The Prince* 70). The image of the slain Orco is accompanied by references to religious iconography and themes, specifically, the adoration and crucifixion of Christ. The inclusion of a "piece of wood and bloody knife" is crucial to my reading of the scene, as it invites the reader well versed in the visual arts to consider the scene a pictorial representation of its referent (30). The inclusion of wood or a tree stump accompanied by an axe or knife in Renaissance painting is iconographically tied to the creative process behind the making of an artwork which also comes about through the destruction of another medium (Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 222-30). The inclusion of wood along with a sharp object such as a knife or axe serves to remind the viewers that the image they are looking at is not real but "rather a wooden panel with paint on it" (230). Fra Filippo Lippi's *The Virgin Adoring the Christ Child in the Wilderness with Saints John the Baptist and Romuald* (1457), painted as the altarpiece for the Medici's Magi Chapel, is one prominent and relevant example of a painting making use of this iconography. Furthermore, the inclusion of the instruments used in the killing of Remirro echoes and subverts a theme in Medieval and Renaissance art known as the *Homo Pietatis*. The theme portrays a sorrowful Christ post-crucifixion, in an intermediate state between life and death, surrounded by the instruments of his torture and execution - or symbols of the Passion (Ferguson 93). The iconography served to inspire devotion to Christ and to remind viewers of his sacrifice

(Nethersole, *Art of Renaissance Florence* 176). Machiavelli's *ekphrasis* does not appropriate these Christian images directly, but rather presents them alongside a quasi-mythological *historia* and reforms them to serve secular ends. This was an artistic trope not at all foreign to the Medici, or to Renaissance Florence in general for that matter, whose commissioned artworks often blurred the lines between Christian, pagan, and political imagery. The outcome of the *spettacolo* is not the salvation of the soul but the temporal salvation of the *patria* and perceived apotheosis of the prince.

The rhetorical manner in which Machiavelli describes the scene is reminiscent of Giannozzo Manetti's *Oratio* (1436), where he describes the consecration ceremony at Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence (Van Eck 449). Machiavelli, like Manetti, attempts to translate visual phenomena - including visual art - into words. In doing so, he focuses on the spectators' reaction to the devotional spectacle in addition to the spectacle itself, just as Manetti does in his *Oratio* (457). As Van Eck argues, this is indicative of a shift away from "medieval accounts of church dedications" as "theological or liturgical writing" to the "rhetorical tradition of description or panegyric" (457). Echoing Alberti's *De pictura*, Manetti expresses challenges in accurately describing visual phenomena - a rhetorical exercise known as *ekphrasis* - and follows criteria as to what must be included and what can be left out of a description of the visual (Van Eck 460). It will be shown that Machiavelli engages in a form of *ekphrasis* in Chapter VII, which will serve as a foundation for the interpretation of Borgia's *spettacolo* as a description of visual *arte* used in the face of tumult. The Albertian concepts of ornament, *imitazione*, and *historia* also help further inform one's reading of Borgia's *spettacolo* as an artwork representing and perpetuating the political sublime.

Ornamenting the *spettacolo*

The significance of Cesare Borgia in *The Prince* has been widely studied in Machiavellian scholarship, however, there is no clear articulation of his function as a statesman making political use of visual art. In *Machiavelli's Politics*, Zuckert argues that the story of Borgia shows how Machiavelli's reader "could succeed better than Cesare did in becoming a truly great, well-regarded, and secure prince" on account of Machiavelli's final word here being that Cesare failed because of his poor decision making (65). By looking at Cesare's overarching role (by looking at his person as an exemplar and not his actions taken separately) one tends to miss the significance of the passage describing Orco's severed corpse. In *Machiavelli and*

Renaissance Italy, Hale states that Machiavelli's use of exemplars "involved distortion" for "he manipulated those events in the past which he thought had the most relevance to the present with such gusto that their lessons could not be missed" (23). Hale here refers to the *Florentine Histories*, but Machiavelli partakes in a similar kind of embellishment in his depiction of Cesare in *The Prince*, again, for the purpose of serving as a lesson to the targeted reader. The politically sublime scene enhances Cesare's qualities as a statesman who uses *arte* to elevate himself along with the *patria,* and Machiavelli calls on his reader to use these qualities he inserts into Cesare's now mythologized character.

In *Foxes and Lions*, Rebhorn considers the scene from Chapter VII as aesthetically crafted by Machiavelli. As he observes, the violent spectacle had the effect of elevating Borgia to a semi-divine status in the eyes of his spectators (123). Rebhorn links this to a form of theatre, however, due to the scene's static nature, it is more akin to a painting or sculpture. Unlike theatre, painting and sculpture provide the viewer with a motionless finished product. The viewer does not get to participate in the viewing of the creation of the artwork; all movement and action is done prior to the finished product and left to the imagination of the viewers, just as the actual slaying of Orco is left to the imagination of the spectators in Cesena. Rebhorn acknowledges the event as "bathed in silence" and "[lacking] explanatory text" yet it had the capacity as a violent spectacle to lead to increased faith of the populace in the prince, pointing to an acknowledgement that images are strong persuasive devices in representing the divine, and thus in persevering power (125). Further evidence of this can be found in the following passage:

> They are deeds in which words and verbal persuasion are supplemented – and at times even displaced – by spectacles of power in which the mute display of force persuades the audience to do the prince's will. They are evidence of Machiavelli's conviction that in the world of history, unlike the "ideal" world of comedy, fraud must include force and a rhetoric of words must sometimes yield to a rhetoric of violence (116).

Rebhorn gets close to articulating an aesthetic angle to the scene of Orco's corpse but just as he fails to straightforwardly call this an act of the political sublime, he also refrains from linking Cesare's spectacle to Renaissance painting. It is through *arte*'s "coloring" of *crudeltà* that the effect of the political sublime is secured.

In *A Ritualist Approach to Machiavelli*, Hochner reads the passage literally (as a publicly staged, ritualized execution) and considers it alongside examples of ancient Roman executions from *Discourses on Livy* (583). She argues that, according to Machiavelli, "rituals and religion are the preferred vectors for social solidarity and cohesion. When the law fails to play its

regulatory role, imagination and rituals allow the preservation of a dissonant but obedient political community" (593). The sight of ritualized violence instills a sense of *virtù* in the spectators and helps revive the initial glory of the foundation of the *patria* (595). I do not dispute the fact that Machiavelli expresses this sentiment in the *Discourses*, however, including Chapter VII from *The Prince* as just another example of the rituals and ceremonial violence found in *Discourses* downplays its uniqueness and disregards its relevance to the Medici-inspired aesthetic angle of *The Prince*. Borgia's spectacle as described by Machiavelli resembles more closely an artwork representing and commemorating the outcome of a violent execution rather than the execution itself.

Much of what Machiavelli included in *The Prince* originally appeared in letters he wrote while on diplomatic missions. This includes the scene of Borgia and Orco, which he reported in a letter to the Council of Ten in Florence.

> On December 26th Machiavelli wrote: "This morning Messer Ramiro has been found cut in two pieces on the piazza [at Cesena] where he still lies, and all the people have been able to see him; the reason for his death is not well known, excepting that such was the pleasure of the prince, who shows us that he can make and unmake men according to their deserts" (Hale, *Machiavelli and Renaissance Italy* 71).

The date, being the morning after Christmas, adds religious significance to the event, and frames Machiavelli's representation of the scene in *The Prince* as intent on reforming Christian typologies and setting them in a secular narrative in a way that calls back to Botticelli's conspirators fresco, Michelangelo's *David*, the *Battle* frescoes of the Great Council Hall, and Gozzoli's *Journey of the Magi to Bethlehem*. Absent from this description sent to the Council of Ten are the people's reaction of satisfaction and stupefaction, the embellished visual ornaments such as the block of wood and bloody knife, and Machiavelli's call on the reader to engage in a form of *imitazione* of the Duke's actions. Essentially, *The Prince*'s version of the spectacle is unique. It emphasizes its sublime aesthetic appearance and the emotional reaction it prompted, includes iconography of the *sacerdotium* reformed for the *regnum*, and serves as a model for *imitazione* to the reader.

Translating visual *arte* into words: *ekphrasis* and *historia*

Text does not have the same impression as images because of the lack of a visual correlation to the real world. A painting or sculpture is effective because it captures the optimal, most essential moment of a narrative. It collapses an entire story into one instant. Because of the absence of an accompanying monological text, there is no guarantee that everyone will get the

same interpretation of an image, however. Studying the iconography of a painting can lead to insights on the intended message of the artwork, but reading a work of art takes skill and effort. This is an issue tackled in the *paragone* of the Renaissance. The claim for the superiority of painting over other liberal arts such as poetry is argued to have first appeared in Leonardo Da Vinci's *Paragone*, found in the first section of his *Trattato della Pittura* (Azzolini 488). In the *Paragone*, Leonardo roots this claim in his axiomatic position that "the eye is the prince among the senses" (Azzolini 495). He makes a number of arguments supporting his view that the art of painting is a superior mode of transmitting ideas compared to the written word. Azzolini lists them as follows:

> (1) the poet's fictions are less pleasing than that of the painter because the painter counterfeits nature; (2) a man's name varies from country to country, whilst his representation (*forma*) remains the same; (3) the image of God is more revered than His name; and (4) the image of the beloved attracts the lover more than her simple description (495).

Machiavelli, who knew Leonardo personally - having worked alongside him in their project to divert the Arno river and having helped secure his services for painting the fresco in the Great Council Hall - would have been aware of the artist's elevated view of the effectiveness of painting on one's senses. He may have even been citing Leonardo when writing, in *The Prince*, that "Men in general judge more by their eyes" and "are taken in by the appearance [...] of a thing" (71). What remains certain is that, despite the ongoing debates expressed in the competitive *paragone* on which art form best served its purpose of *imitazione*, there was a marked effort to acknowledge the effectiveness of images over words.

As far as we know, Machiavelli was not skilled in the visual arts. Nevertheless, his attempt at writing an *ekphrasis* - a written description of a visual phenomenon - shows intent in participating in the debate of the *paragone*. Through his *ekphrasis* of Borgia's *spettacolo*, Machiavelli joins Leonardo in arguing for the superiority of painting in eliciting a desired effect by drawing attention to the limitations of text when describing visual phenomena. The people of Cesena did not have to "read" too deeply into Borgia's display of Orco, the message was received as quickly as the spectacle appeared. Nevertheless, as Rebhorn points out, much is left ambiguous in what Machiavelli presents in the passage from Chapter VII that is perhaps left for his Medici reader to piece together. Rebhorn writes:

> From one perspective, the knife and wood can be read as referring to the executioner's sword and block, so that the scene becomes a direct representation of public justice. From yet another perspective, they may refer to the equipment of a butcher and be interpreted either as recalling Remirro's treatment of the

> Romagna or as pointing to a fundamental savagery in Remirro's nature. From still a third perspective, the piece of wood – a bludgeon – may refer to Remirro's crude justice, the knife – a rapier – to Borgia's subtle finesse. Machiavelli's text enhances the spectacle's ambiguity for his readers because he offers no explanation of the symbolism involved. Indeed, he never even explains just what two pieces Remirro's body was divided into (121).

Whereas the image and the exact placement of the objects involved (and exactly which two pieces of Remirro were severed) would have been clear to the people witnessing it in Cesena, Machiavelli's recounting of it is less so. Machiavelli does not describe the scene in overt detail but rather keeps to what is sufficiently necessary to know and focuses on the reaction it produced from the people. Leaving certain details out or hidden, Machiavelli urges the reader to apply their imagination and fill in the gaps.

In his *Oratio*, Manetti expresses challenges in accurately describing visual phenomena and set a guideline as to what must be included and what can be left out of a description of the visual (Van Eck 460):

> [We] shall imitate not without cause in our sketch ('adumbratione') that excellent ancient painter who wanted to express the mournful sacrifice of the slaughtered Iphigenia in the best way. And having depicted ['pingendo statuisset'] Calchas dejected, Ulysses sad, Ajax shouting and Menelaus lamenting before the altar, the head of Agamemnon himself he covered completely. In this he did very well in my opinion: what he did not think he could properly represent ['exprimere'] by the drawings of his art, he left very rightly to the judgment of the onlooker. We shall in the same way in this sketch ['adumbratione'] of this very glorious ceremony touch as lightly, so to speak, as possible only those things which can be explained adequately in words, and omit all other things. However, we will leave everything else to your excellent judgment (II. 20-8).

A similar passage appears in Alberti's *De pictura*, which was written and completed while Manetti worked on his *Oratio* (Van Eck 461). Although, rather than dealing with the problems of verbally representing images, Alberti's passage highlights the challenges of accurately and adequately representing an *historia* through painting:

> One praises Timanthes of Cyprus [for] that painting with which he surpassed Colotes of Teios for the fact that, having represented, in the sacrifice of Iphigenia, Calchas saddened [and] Ulysses more dejected, and having engaged every art and skill in showing Menelaus afflicted by pain, [and] after having exhausted the states of mind, not knowing in which way to properly render the face of the very sad father, he wrapped his head with rags in order to leave to each one [spectator] a reason to turn the mind to the pain of that [father] more than one could perceive with sight (2.42).

Manetti compares the orator to the painter who, according to Alberti, can leave certain elements out of a painting and up to "the mind" of the spectator to imagine. *Ekphrasis* is a rhetorical practice describing a work of art that, according to Hermogenes, "must bring about seeing through hearing" (Van Eck 460). In his description of Santa Maria del Fiore, Manetti tends to Hermogenes' advice and provides a "vivid and evocative description" of the consecration

including the various artworks and architecture of the cathedral and *Duomo* (460). Alternatively, Italian humanist Leonardo Bruni expressed satisfaction with minimal to no description of Florence's grand architecture in his *Urbis Florentinae laudatio* (1401). He writes: "These things are certainly known to everyone and exposed before our eyes, and do not need any description" (240). Machiavelli's depiction of Borgia's *spettacolo* is not as extensively descriptive as Manetti's *Oratio* but neither does it follow in Bruni's statement undermining description altogether. It is not as overt as Manetti's account of the consecration ceremony because it did not have to be. Machiavelli was not describing a whole procession or ceremony, but rather a static piece. Furthermore, compared to the account from his letter to the Ten, the account from *The Prince* is more descriptive of the scene's visual elements. The addition of the piece of wood and bloody knife, along with the reaction of the spectators, indicates a shift away from a mere reporting of the event to something resembling an *ekphrasis*. It resembles more closely the aforementioned passage from Manetti than that of Bruni because it emphasizes the aesthetic components of a visual description along with the ambiguities that can be left to the "judgement of the onlooker" (Manetti II, 20-8). As a statement borrowed from the corresponding passage in *De pictura*, this is an example of yet another one of Machiavelli's uses of rhetoric stemming from Alberti's art theory.

As a painting, the *spettacolo* would appear significantly less ambiguous in that descriptive indicators such as the shape, size, and placement of the piece of wood and the knife, along with the exact fashion in which Orco was severed and displayed, would be made visible. As an *ekphrasis*, the passage tends to Manetti's approach to visual description of "[touching] as lightly, so to speak, as possible only those things which can be explained adequately in words, and [omitting] all other things" (II. 20-8). Manetti focuses his description on the "architectural setting, the material splendor of the ceremony, and its effect on the audience" (Van Eck 457). Terms such as "*magnificentia", "admirable*", and "*incredibile*" point toward the impression made on the viewers, suggesting that proper *ekphrasis* describes the onlookers' reactions as much as the works of art themselves (457). In a way that echoes *David*'s *terribilità*, Machiavelli uses the term "*ferocità*" to describe the impression of the spectacle before describing the onlookers as *sattisfati* and *stupidi* (*Il principe* 70). Before stating the reaction to the image of Remirro's corpse, Machiavelli describes the context leading up to the morning of December 26th. Like the *ekphrasis* of the *Oratio*, Machiavelli's description of the visual *arte* of Borgia is

presented within a narrative (Van Eck 458). Machiavelli historicizes Borgia's *spettacolo* in his chronological description of the Duke's gaining control over the Romagna, his desire to bring good governance to Cesena, Remirro's appointment as Minister, the law and order he instituted, the hatred he attracted from some of the people for his malignancy, and Cesare's decision to purge the town of that hatred through Remirro's execution:

> And because this point is deserving of notice and of being imitated by others, I do not want to leave it out. Once the duke had taken over Romagna, he found it had been commanded by impotent lords who had been readier to despoil their subjects than to correct them, and had given their subjects matter for disunion, not for union. Since that province was quite full of robberies, quarrels, and every other kind of insolence, he judged it necessary to give it good government, if he wanted to reduce it to peace and obedience to a kingly arm. So he put there Messer Remirro de Orco, a cruel and ready man, to whom he gave the fullest power. In a short time Remirro reduced it to peace and unity, with the very greatest reputation for himself. Then the duke judged that such excessive authority was not necessary, because he feared that it might become hateful; and he set up a civil court in the middle of the province, with a most excellent president, where each city had its advocate. And because he knew that past rigors had generated some hatred for Remirro, to purge the spirits of that people and to gain them entirely to himself, he wished to show that if any cruelty had been committed, this had not come from him but from the harsh nature of his minister. And having seized this opportunity, he had him placed one morning in the piazza at Cesena in two pieces, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him (*The Prince* 29-30).

Although presented as part of a narrative, Orco "in the piazza at Cesena in two pieces, with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him" (30) is less of a direct application of Albertian *historia* and more of a cult image mimicking the *sacerdotium*'s tradition of the icon (Keizer 304). There are, however, parallels worth noting. In *De pictura*, Alberti considers *historia* an essential component to good painting. He defined the *historia* as "a large work for a public space that included multiple figures" (Keizer 308). A *historia* should have multiple bodies captured in motion and arranged in relation to one another, with special attention placed on the right "size, function, species, and colors" of the composed objects (Alberti, *On Painting* 2.35-37). Through its "richness" and "variety of objects", a *historia* stimulates the senses and "attract[s] for a long time the eyes of the instructed spectator, or even illiterate, with a certain sense of pleasure and emotion of the mind" (2.40). It is akin to Machiavelli's statement of the people's satisfaction experienced in viewing Orco's lifeless body. Alberti considers the relationship between painting and spectator as bound by emotion. A *historia* can strongly affect the emotions of the viewers who are able to empathize with the painting's subjects:

> Then a *historia* will stimulate the observers' hearts when men who were idle will display, to the highest degree, their own activity of the mind. It derives from Nature, in fact - one can find nothing more covetous than her regarding [emotions] similar to ourselves - that we cry with those who cry, we laugh with those who laugh, we grieve with those who suffer (2.41).

The spectators of the artwork participate in the *historia* through their reaction to it, and in a way validate its meaning. Alberti further proclaims that

> in the *historia* there is someone who informs the spectators of the things that unfold; or invites with the hand to show; or threatens with severe face and turbid eyes not to approach there, as if he wishes that a similar story remains secret; or indicates a danger or another [attribute] over there to observe; or invites you with his own gestures to laugh together or cry in company. It is necessary, in the end, that also all [the occurrences] that those painted [characters] made with the spectators and with themselves, concur to realize and explain the *historia* (2.42).

A *historia* gains meaning and explanation through the painted characters' interaction with the spectators and the spectators' corresponding reactions. Machiavelli's sublime passage in Chapter VII is similar to both Manetti's *ekphrasis* and Alberti's *historia* in that it relies on the spectators' reaction and emotions to clarify the significance of the scene. This relationship between spectators and *arte* is distinctly political for Machiavelli because the people's reaction ultimately gives power and legitimacy to Cesare's rule. Their acceptance of Borgia as Duke is reliant on the proper application of aesthetics on his part. Like Alberti's theory of *historia*, *arte* and spectator "concur to realize and explain" Borgia's legitimacy (2.42).

The scene in Cesena lacks the "multiplicity of bodies and colors" Alberti deems important in a *historia*, however, it is still successful in drawing out the intended response from the viewers. The piece of wood, bloody knife and severed corpse interact with the spectators by at once indicating the possibility of danger and inviting their curiosity and awe, leaving them "satisfied and stupefied". The lack of motion in the objects depicted suspend the narrative, but act as typologies to what is physically absent from the scene - specifically Borgia himself. The spectators in the piazza did not need words to make sense of the sublime display. Through its iconography, they understood at once that Cesare liberated them from the despised beast and, as such, secured both their awe and fear. The slaying of his minister and childhood friend, who Machiavelli renames "Orco" (literally Italian for "ogre"), typologically places Cesare amongst the tropes of mythological heroes who have slain a beast (Theseus and the bull) or conducted a necessary elimination of a close friend or relative to secure the glory of the *patria* (Romulus' killing of Remus). His familial tie to Pope Alexander VI connects him to a form of divine authority, typologically linking him to Moses as ambassador of God. Whereas Moses secures divine authority through his delivery of the stone tablets, Borgia secures his in delivering Orco's severed corpse. The secular and pagan elements of the passage are part of the *historia* or narrative of the *spettacolo* while the Christian typologies, as will be shown, appear in the

stillness of the icons presented at the scene. The satisfaction generated by the *historia* is paired with the stupefaction prompted by the devotional icons. Machiavelli thus suggests that the combination between the sacred and the secular for political ends can be best achieved through visual *arte*. The aesthetic description of the spectacle introduces an element present in none of the exemplars – a keen eye for striking visual artistry, making Borgia's role particularly exemplary to the Medici. As Machiavelli states, Borgia's show of sublime power is a point "deserving […] of being imitated by others" (*The Prince* 29).

Machivelli's presentation of Borgia's *spettacolo* is clearly evocative of the rhetorical exercise of *ekphrasis*. It deviates from the humanist model of the panegyric, however, in that it is an *ekphrasis* that goes beyond description for the sake of praise - it is meant to stand as a model for *imitazione*. In *Institutio oratoria*, Quintilian treats the panegyric as a descriptive rhetorical practice set on praising that which is being described. For Quintilian, "[praise] may be awarded to public works, in connexion with their magnificence, utility, beauty, and the architect or artist must be given due consideration" (III.vii.26). Although Machiavelli praises Borgia for his actions in claiming that he does "not know what better teaching [he] could give to a new prince than the example of [the duke's] actions", Machiavelli's description of the scene in Cesena lacks direct praise in the traditional sense (*The Prince* 27). "Ferocity" takes the place of words like "magnificence" or "beauty", which suggests that the praise on Machiavelli's part is directed at the utility of the work of *arte* he describes. Looking back at Machiavelli's lion and fox metaphor, one finds ferocity attributed to the lion whose role is to "frighten the wolves" (*The Prince* 69). This does not mean that Borgia's *spettacolo* is an entirely lion-like act. On the contrary, it is an act of ferocity that is "colored" with the appearance of mercy, and religiosity (70). It is therefore a prime example of the fox-like use of aesthetics to deceive the populace into viewing the prince as a god-like savior of the *patria* in place of a hated beast, a role instead ascribed to Remirro. The spectacle, as a work of *arte*, is part of the legitimization process of Cesare's rule.

Much like Borgia's work of *arte*, and the *arte* of the Medici and the Florentine Republic, Machiavelli's *ekphrasis* serves a strategic purpose. The description of the spectators as "at once satisfied and stupefied" indicates that the image was aesthetically sublime. The fact that it is sublime is significant, but it would not have been altogether obvious without the inclusion of the two words pointing to the people's reaction (*The Prince* 30). The description of the spectator's reaction also indicates the significance of the people's judgement on the appearances of the

prince. The people play a role in legitimizing Cesare's rule through their reaction to his sublime *arte*. Unnecessary details are left out because the reader must not dwell on the "real" scene, or as Hochner would put it, a ritualized execution. The reader must instead focus on the representation of it as a work of visual *arte* that would transcend the event itself and remain part of the people's political imagination, leading to a longer lasting, nearly perpetual, effect of the political sublime. Furthermore, lacking in painterly skills, Machiavelli attempts to preserve Borgia's violent spectacle by representing it in writing so as to express to his Medici readers the limitations of text over what can be more vividly represented and experienced through visual *arte*. Machiavelli's *ekphrasis* of Borgia's *spettacolo* expresses how an artist might go about taking the memory of violence and transferring it into a sublime image elevating the prince and securing the legitimacy and glory of the *patria*.

Icons of the *spettacolo*: body, blood, knife, and wood

Despite the notion of *historia*, paintings are not the most ideal storytellers - particularly when compared to oration or text - but are good at delivering typologies and anagogy. Alberti saw a "dependence of art on text" and "defined painting almost purely as a vehicle of textual transmission" (Keizer 308). This was set as the standard for representation in Florentine art at the time, until challenged by Michelangelo's view of art as a process in and of itself, distinct from any textual referent (308). Machiavelli's embellished depiction of Remirro's death in *The Prince* deviates from his more factually based letters, about which Rebhorn declares: "A reader of these letters would have perceived Cesare Borgia's disposal of Remirro as a process, perhaps one involving an investigation and judgement, which lasted several days" (119). In Chapter VII, Machiavelli dispenses with this procedural "storytelling" after his contextualization of the scene and instead presents Borgia acting with "terrifying speed" and, in so doing, tries to capture as closely as possible the instantaneous effect of a sacred devotional painting set in a secular *historia* (119).

Machiavelli leaves the ambiguities of his *ekphrasis* to the "excellent judgement" of his reader, as Manetti would have it. Why Machiavelli thought it appropriate to leave out specific details of size, shape, and placement is not known. However, the role of the scenes' "ornaments" as signifiers of subverted Christian icons that would be recognizable to a Medici reader serve as a possible explanation. The *ekphrasis* points toward a grander political significance of the use of sublime *arte* as a means of securing and perpetuating legitimacy and glory. The lack of a

description of size, shape and placement of the scenes' icons suggests their irrelevance to the purpose of Machiavelli's *ekphrasis*. The relevance is in the icons themselves; the body, the blood, the knife, and wood all echo elements of Christian iconography popular in Renaissance Florentine art, found specifically in devotional works depicting scenes from the Passion, such as Fra Angelico's *Homo Pietatis* (1438-45), and more pertinent, a unique version of the Nativity by Fra Filippo Lippi - *The Virgin Adoring the Christ Child in the Wilderness with Saints John the Baptist and Romuald*. Machiavelli echoes these icons so as to strip them of their religious significance through his inversion and repurposing of their Christian counterparts to fit his secular vision of the use of sublime *arte*.

In *Reading Machiavelli*, McCormick argues for a reading of Borgia's exploits in Chapter VII as allegorical to the Gospels (21). He makes astute links between Cesare and Christ as savior of the people sent by a divine authority. God sends his son Jesus "to bring peace and unity on earth" while Alexander VI sends his son Cesare to do the same for the people of the Romagna (30). However, there are obvious inversions of the ultimate role of Christ in the figure of Borgia. Borgia does not give himself up to save the people in Cesena but instead opts to elect a minister, Orco, to do the dirty work and serve as the sacrificial lamb in his place. There is also the lack of a resurrection, whether metaphorical, political, or literal. This, as McCormick argues, indicates Machiavelli's engagement with, and inversion of the Gospels' teachings to fit the political narrative and teachings of *The Prince* (41). Machiavelli thus introduces the passage with what would strike readers raised on Dante, and the Catholic faith more generally, as familiar yet novel in its political intent and application. Based on Machiavelli's appropriation of Albertian language throughout *The Prince*, along with his use of *ekphrasis*, the depiction of Borgia's *spettacolo* appears more as an inversion of the role of Christian art than an inversion of scripture. Machiavelli's references are not the Gospels as text but the visual artworks depicting the aforementioned Christian themes. The distinction is important to make, because it sheds light on the political stamina of a sublime image, and on the visual components of religion as its most favorable and useful aspect for those who rule and those who are ruled (*The Prince* 70-1). It is also not inversion for its own sake. As an allegory of the *use* of religiously inspired art to gain glory and legitimacy in a secular context, the *spettacolo*'s typologies become tools for Machiavelli's "effectual truth" of politics.

In addition to sharing traits with Romulus, Theseus, Cyrus, and Moses, Cesare Borgia is set up in Chapter VII as a political inversion of Christ. Unlike the four exemplars from the preceding chapter, Borgia comes to power through *fortuna* alone and is able to maintain it with his *virtù*. It is specifically "*la fortuna del padre*" that provides him the opportunity to "acquire his state" (*Il principe* 64; *The Prince* 27). Mansfield translates this to "the fortune of his father", however it can also be read as "the fortune of *the* father". The father here can thus be understood as both signifying Alexander VI and God, father of Christ (27). This Christian allegory is quickly followed by the analogy of an architect and their building: "For, as was said above, whoever does not lay his foundations at first might be able, with great virtue, to lay them later, although they might have to be laid with hardship for the architect and with danger to the building" (27). The architect may be understood as the prince and the building his state, but a literal application of these terms (as they are understood in Chapter XX through the use of fortresses) suggests that visual art may be difficult to properly use as a concealer of the prince's cruelties and as a safeguard against popular hatred if used too late. Borgia, who "laid for himself great foundations for future power" had no problem using *arte* as one of the "steps" toward his claim to power and legitimacy (27). The allegory of Cesare as a political inversion of Christ is coupled with an analogy speaking to the visual arts' relevance to statecraft. Three concepts are thus merged into the narrative leading up to Borgia's *spettacolo*: religion, the secular state, and *arte*. This would appear as highly significant to a Medici reader at the time of *The Prince*'s completion. Machiavelli writes *The Prince* while the Medici have power over both Florence and the papacy in Rome - Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici (*il Magnifico's* son) rules over Rome's pontificate as Pope Leo X, while Giuliano de' Medici, brother of Giovanni, ruled Florence. Machiavelli of course dedicates *The Prince* to Lorenzo de' Medici (1492-1519), grandson of *il Magnifico*, after Giuliano, his original dedicatee, had died in 1516 (Mansfield, *The Prince* footnote 3). In tying Borgia to the *regnum*, *sacerdotium* and *arte*, Machiavelli sets him up as a prime exemplar to the Medici who were deeply involved in all three of these facets of political life. To read Borgia's *spettacolo* aesthetically, as would a Medici, requires some art-historical context behind the icons presented at the scene.

As Christian iconography, the body and blood at the scene serve as typologies for the body and blood of Christ. Although not severed in two pieces, Christ's mangled and tortured body appears in several works depicting stages of the Passion such as the crucifixion. Botticelli's

Trinity with the Saints (1491-4), and the more bloody *Crucifixion with the Virgin and Saint Jerome* from the Workshop of Sandro Botticelli (1495), serve as some examples of how the iconography of blood made a return during Savonarola's rule of Florence (1494-1498) from the more classical depictions of Christ's body (Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 120). Mostly present in Medieval Christian art and in prayer pieces reserved for religious convents and confraternities such as Fra Angelico's *Crucifixion with St Dominic* (1442), blood was meant to remind the viewers of Christ's sacrifice and prompt meditation and devotion to the savior represented in image form (116-117). The *Homo Pietatis*, or "Man of Sorrows" theme, is particularly exemplary of this form of devotional meditation in art. The iconography of the *spettacolo* is presented in a way that is evocative of some of the elements of the *Homo Pietatis* while subverting others. Fra Angelico's version of the theme depicts

> a pitiful image of the half-length Christ as the Man of Sorrows, standing in his tomb, surrounded by the symbols of the Passion. In the foreground, the Virgin rests her head on her hand, facing away from her son in deep contemplation, while St Thomas Aquinas, kneeling, stares upwards and outwards (Nethersole, *Art of Renaissance Florence* 176).

The fresco also incorporates the iconography of the *arma Christi* (176). The instruments of Christ's torture and execution are depicted disjointedly and surround his body much like the piece of wood and bloody knife are depicted beside the body of Remirro. In this instance, the wood in Machiavelli's *ekphrasis* would serve as a reminder of the cross on which Christ was crucified and the bloody knife would serve as a reminder of the bloody nails used to crucify him. The point in evoking these is to invite the reader to consider the political effectiveness of Borgia's sublime *spettacolo* alongside the comparably less politically effective devotional artworks. Machiavelli provides the reader with an *ekphrasis* of a Passion *manqué* and in so doing, exemplifies the displacement of Christian traditions with aesthetics of the political sublime.

The figures of Mary and Aquinas in Fra Angelico's painting inform the viewers of how to interact with the fresco. They do not show despair but appear in deep thought. This can be contrasted with the Virgin and St John in Lorenzo Monaco's *Homo Pietatis with the Arma Christi* (1404), whose emotional distress is made apparent and is thus meant to provoke the emotion of distress. There are no stand-ins for Mary and Aquinas, or Mary and St John, in Machiavelli's *ekphrasis*. Instead, there is the reaction of the spectators whose "satisfaction and stupefaction" is informed solely through the body, blood, knife, and wood. Machiavelli removes

any form of visual referent of Remirro's humanity by robbing him of a Mary, Aquinas, or John. There is no one to mourn his death and no typology to prompt any form of sympathy for the severed Orco. There is no future resurrection or promise of an afterlife. These are replaced with the civil "peace and unity", and acknowledgment of Cesare's legitimacy, secured by the aesthetics of the sublime *spettacolo* (*The Prince* 30).

Treating Remirro's corpse, the blood on the knife, and the block of wood as devotional icons subverting Christ's sacrifice renders Borgia's *spettacolo* religious in appearance while political in its outcome, both to the people of Cesena within the narrative and to the reader of Machiavelli's passage. While the spectators within the narrative experience "satisfaction and stupefaction" in viewing the scene, Machiavelli's reader should take heed of its typologies in a more intellectual and rational manner, mirroring the contemplativeness of Fra Angelico's Mary and Aquinas. The scene's icons subvert their religious counterparts while mimicking their appearance. To be clear, it *appears* religious and inspires a similar devotional response (satisfaction and stupefaction, or the sublime), but it does not actually ascribe the virtues of the Christian religion. It is inherently secular and political, and aims at wholly temporal outcomes. It also distorts and reforms Christ's role as savior. Borgia is not depicted in two pieces, his "kingly arm" Orco is (*The Prince* 29). His sacrifice renders Borgia politically sublime, even though Borgia is physically absent from the scene on the morning after Christmas. Unlike secular art, which sought to give the "illusion of nature", sacred art followed Aquinas' argument circumventing the issue of idolatry, that "the honour given to an image reaches to the prototype", being Christ "the exemplar" (Nethersole, *Art of Renaissance Florence* 172). In sacred art, that which is depicted is meant to serve merely as a representation of the "exemplar behind and beyond it" (172). As a secular devotional piece, the *spettacolo* directs the minds and devotion of the spectators to the omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient Borgia.

The *spettacolo* is typologically evocative of more than just images of Christ's sacrifice. Turning to Fra Filippo Lippi's *The Virgin Adoring the Christ Child in the Wilderness with Saints John the Baptist and Romuald*, the links between Borgia's *spettacolo* and the visual *arte* of the Medici become even more apparent. The painting served as the Medici altarpiece in the Magi Chapel. It was displayed in the same space as Benozzo Gozzoli's *Journey of the Magi to Bethlehem*, which depicted the procession of the Magi and members of the Medici family "proceeding toward Christ in Lippi's altarpiece" (Nethersole, *Art of Renaissance Florence* 115).

Set in a dark forest reminiscent of Dante's strayed path at the beginning of *Inferno,* it is not a traditional nativity or adoration scene. It is mystical and even mythological in style and appearance, resembling elements of Botticelli's *Primavera* (1470s) more than the devotional artworks of Fra Angelico. Yet, it nevertheless served as a private devotional piece meant to "facilitate [the Medici's] own spiritual practice" and secure "their personal salvation" (Solum 19). The family altar was a "distinction" granted to Cosimo and his wife Contessina de' Bardi by Pope Martin V (25). It is thus fitting that Machiavelli would choose to reference Lippi's *Adoration* in his *ekphrasis* - the metaphorical "altar" of Cesena granted to Cesare by Alexander VI required an accompanying altarpiece.

To a Medici reader, the piece of wood and bloody knife would most vividly evoke the axe and tree stump featured in the foreground of the family's altarpiece. To the left of Christ the child is this lesser known iconography often associated with John the Baptist, who stands just above it (Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 224). Recent scholarship suggests the painting was commissioned by Lucrezia Tornabuoni, mother of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Her piety and religious poetry were the source of inspiration behind the commission, which contrasts with the secularized *Journey of the Magi* frescoes (Solum 42). The *spettacolo* is ultimately given its aesthetic significance through the icons of the wood and knife not simply as inversions of Christian icons, but as signifiers of the process of making *arte*. The wood and axe icon points to the destructive process behind the creation of an artwork (Nethersole, *Art and Violence in Early Renaissance Florence* 224). The axe, on which Lippi signs his name, serves as the artist's tool while the wood is reminiscent of the panel on which the artist works (226). It is therefore a self-conscious point of reference "hinting at the material fact of the altarpiece" (230). Just as the axe and tree stump draw attention to the altarpiece as an artwork, Machiavelli's inclusion of the "piece of wood and bloody knife" in Chapter VII draws attention to Borgia's *spettacolo* as an *ekphrasis* of an artwork. Absent from all other accounts of the *spettacolo*, the icons would draw the Medici's mind toward reading *The Prince*'s version of it as an *ekphrasis* - as a description of a work of *arte*. Lippi's *Adoration* was the focal point of Gozzoli's *Magi* frescoes and was therefore conjoined to its political function of legitimizing and glorifying Medici rule (Lee 153). The interplay between the political and the devotional manifested through the spatial interaction between Gozzoli's frescoes and Lippi's altarpiece is a motif Machiavelli echoes in his *ekphrasis*. Borgia's legitimacy and glory is secured in the eyes of

the people through the politically sublime *spettacolo* just as the Medici's legitimacy and glory was promoted to powerful rulers through Gozzoli and Lippi's aesthetically sublime *arte*.

The crossover between the devotional and the political is further exemplified through the relationship between the wood and axe icon with images of John the Baptist. The axe, associated with the Baptist's call to penitence in Matthew 3:10[15], serves as a "mediator between viewer and painting" (Solum 29). In the words of Solum, "[the axe] welcomes in order to warn, and its power to enact the kind of destruction threatened by the Baptist's preaching is amply evidenced by the forest which is littered with over 50 examples of divine punishment meted out" (30). The knife in Borgia's *spettacolo* serves a similar function for the spectators in Cesena. It does not harm them but is perceived as a warning sign to those who would challenge Borgia. The Saint's iconographic association as "patron and protector of Florence" suggests that his image served both religious and secular functions (30). Every year, on the 23rd of June (the vigil of the Baptist's feast), Florentines would hear the recitation of Jeremiah 1:4-10[16] in which God calls on a child prophet (believed to be fulfilled by John the Baptist) who wields the power to both destroy and create (40). The saint was thus associated with the process of destruction and creation through penitence, which is iconographically identified in Lippi's painting through the axe and chopped tree stump. On the 24th of June, the saint's feast day, Florentines celebrated what appears to be more of a secular ritual than a Christian one. The feast acted as a backdrop on which civil and social relations were reforged, characterized by Trexler as "an enormous contractual setting" (267). The Baptist's association with penitence was thus coupled with his role as a civic icon. Machiavelli may not have described the spectators as penitent, yet the undeniable typology of the piece of wood and axe/knife suggests a marked effort on Machiavelli's part to draw attention to the *spettacolo* as sublime visual *arte* meant to inspire political devotion. It is through the knife and wood that Machiavelli expresses Borgia's role as protector of his acquired *patria* while indicating the aesthetic artifice of the scene. The icon of the body and blood secures the devotion of the people. All four icons express the ability to create through an act of destruction.

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[15] "for now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that doth not yield good fruit, shall be cut down, and cast into the fire."

[16] "and the Lord said to me behold I have given my words in thy mouth. Lo,I have set thee this day over the nations, and over kingdoms, to root up, and to pull down, and to waste, and to destroy, and to build, and to plant."

What might come off as problematic for Machiavelli is the fact that most religious art in his day did not engage in *sprezzatura*. A devotional piece is not art that seeks to conceal art; instead, it draws attention to itself as a pictorial representation of what the viewer's devotion should be directed towards. It essentially lacks the concealing aspect Machiavelli considers necessary in a prince's rule. In setting an *ekphrasis* of what appears as devotional art within a secular narrative, Machiavelli overcomes this issue. The religious typologies of the *spettacolo* do not prompt the viewers to direct their devotion to a religious exemplar, but to Borgia, a secular and temporal exemplar who is only made to *appear* semi-divine. In his narrative, Machiavelli molds the aesthetics of religion to serve as concealers of necessary political cruelties and revealers of civic mercy and grace. There is, therefore, a clear discrepancy between the message relayed to the spectators within the narrative and the message Machiavelli directs to his Medici reader. Borgia conceals his effectual truth from his spectators, who judge only by what they see, while revealing the appearance of divine political benevolence. Machiavelli invites more than the Medici's eyes in his *ekphrasis*; he enforces his relationship to them as one based on "touch" - on a deeper understanding of how *arte* legitimizes and elevates their political rule in Florence. The typological exercise Machiavelli provides in Chapter VII would allow his Medici readers to connect Borgia's *spettacolo* to the sublime artworks displayed in their small private chapel through the icons of the body, blood, and most vividly, the knife and wood. Through his subversion of the role of Christian icons and allegories, Machiavelli may very well be advising the Medici to sever these works from their religious function in the family's private place of worship and direct their sublime aesthetics to the public's gaze for a more totalizing political effect.

The outcome of appearances

Few scholars consider the aesthetic angle to the passage from Chapter VII. Those who do, such as Hochner and Rebhorn, fail to sufficiently account for a historically contextual aesthetic theory, such as Alberti's. Machiavelli echoes Cesare's actions in Chapter XXI when he writes that a prince "should at suitable times of the year keep the people occupied with festivals and spectacles" (*The Prince* 91). Machiavelli refers to Borgia's display of Orco's corpse as a "spectacle" in Chapter VII, indicating that such a sublime image can keep the prince in high esteem if repeated at "suitable times of the year" (91). The problem with repeating acts of sublime violence is that they are wholly reliant on the *virtù* of the ruler orchestrating the act. The

repetition of a violent act ultimately becomes ineffective and unlikely to yield the desired results due to an overabundance of cruelty (*The Prince* 38). If the effects of the sublime spectacle are to persist throughout time, even beyond the ruler's death, visual representations of the sublime may serve as a more secure alternative. The significance of evoking spectacles in the chapter advising a prince to "honour those who are excellent in an art" in order to maintain esteem is that it may be read as serving as an extension and clarification to the advice given in VII. Not only must a prince be able to orchestrate a sublime spectacle in order to attract the fear and awe of the people and thus secure a state, but they must "honour" or make use of artists as an extension of their act.

Machiavelli therefore suggests that visual art can act as a vehicle for the political sublime. Borgia's *spettacolo* shows the practicality of aestheticizing representations of power. It creates a bond between artwork and spectators, which extends to the bond between ruler and people, where legitimacy is earned on the basis of appearances. Recalling the analogy of the Dedicatory Letter, just as the artist interprets the mountains aesthetically by representing them in a *disegno*, so too does Machiavelli, and by extension the people, visually interpret the prince aesthetically (*The Prince* 4). Presenting the *spettacolo* in the rhetorical format of an *ekphrasis*, Machiavelli blurs the line between *realpolitik* and *arte*. Sequentially placing Borgia after Chapter VI's discussion of the prime exemplars typologically ties him to the mythical founder, while the inverted allegory of Christ and references to John the Baptist ties him to the appearance and use of religion for political ends, therefore blurring the line between the mythical, sacred, and secular. Machiavelli skillfully employs through text that which he advises the Medici to "imitate" through visual *arte*. The ambiguities between the secular and sacred elements of the frescoes and altarpiece in the Medici Chapel suggest that the Medici participated in the promotion of this aesthetic crossover. Many of their commissions, however, were privately displayed. Borgia's act needed an audience to create any sort of lasting effect in support of his legitimacy and glory. Appearances are thus tied to their outcomes. Indeed, "the vulgar are taken in by the appearance *and* the outcome of a thing" (*The Prince* 71, emphasis added). The outcome of sublime *arte* is not the salvation of the soul but the temporal salvation of the *patria*. The appearance of religion, judged and experienced aesthetically by the people, results in the more favorable outcome of worldly glory. The *arte* of Machiavelli's Florence, therefore, requires a public space to fulfill its political role as a medium that institutionalizes and perpetuates the effects of the political sublime.

Conclusion

Machiavelli's rhetoric of aesthetics, along with his *ekphrasis* of Borgia's *spettacolo*, point to a larger lesson on the power of the imagination as a significant political concern. The teaching with regards to the use of visual *arte* in politics gleaned from *The Prince* ultimately suggests that political power, glory, and legitimacy are reliant on the people's response to the appearances a ruler uses in embellishing the state as much as they are on the cunning *virtù* of the rulers themselves. To use *arte* as a means to political legitimacy and glory in times of tumult is to offer the people an opportunity for civic engagement and judgement. As Solum contends, Italian Renaissance art presents a "relationship between what [images] *mean* and what they *do*" (2). Machiavelli's teaching on *arte* departs from Aristotelian mimesis, in that its purpose is not to tend to moral edification. It also departs from the Medieval Christian conception of art which serves to facilitate religious devotion and eventual salvation of the soul. It is likewise not a view of "art for art's sake" which Michelangelo would later ascribe to (Keizer 308). Machiavelli sees art distinctly as a political tool which could make use of a religious aesthetic in combination with the secular. It is amoral, and intent on the salvation of the *patria*. Although it is incumbent on princes to use their *virtù* in ensuring that the outcome matches their intention, there is always the possibility that *fortuna* takes its course and ruins the prince, as it did Cesare, and as it ultimately did for the Medici, for Savonarola, and the Republic. The changes in government are both results and causes of societal tumult, and in quattro-cinquecento Florence, were often met with an effort on the part of the newly established government to concretize their legitimacy through the patronage of the visual arts.

The role of the viewer of visual artworks is significant in determining the political effects of works, which is why Machiavelli's *ekphrasis* emphasizes the spectators' response of "satisfaction and stupefaction". If the Medici are to secure their place in Florence as legitimate rulers, they must acknowledge the role of the citizenry in granting them this legitimacy through their engagement and response to the visual art they commission. *Arte*, therefore, is not only a means to legitimacy for a ruler but also a means for the people to participate in politics through a visual engagement with the *arte* of the *patria*. This civic engagement, intertwined with a sense of religious devotion, is nevertheless based on fraudulence and is emotional rather than rational. If visual art both conceals what is and reveals what seems to be, then its use in harnessing political power and legitimacy implies that civic engagement is predicated on the application of

imaginative faculties. A prince must therefore take into consideration beliefs and ideas formed in others based on sublime appearances. Such appearances are in the control of the prince to craft and display with the aid of artists and their *arte*.

Reading *The Prince* as including advice and rhetoric relating to the visual arts of Florence allows for the possibility of a clearer outlook on Machiavelli's republicanism and on his views of what constitutes legitimate rule - can a free republic truly gain legitimacy through aesthetic means? This is an outlook that future "aesthetic" readings of the *Discourses on Livy* and *Florentine Histories* can better inform. *Arte* provides an oftentimes literal canvas on which the imagination becomes material, visual and tactile. It allows for imagination to be experienced through the senses, thereby adding a sensory and aesthetic experience to politics similar to that found in religion. *Arte* brings imagination from the metaphysical to the physical realm and prompts desired reactions out of those who are faced with it that affect the course of political action and decision making. This ultimately makes Renaissance *arte*, and the imagination, part of the effectual truth of Machiavelli's aesthetic advice.

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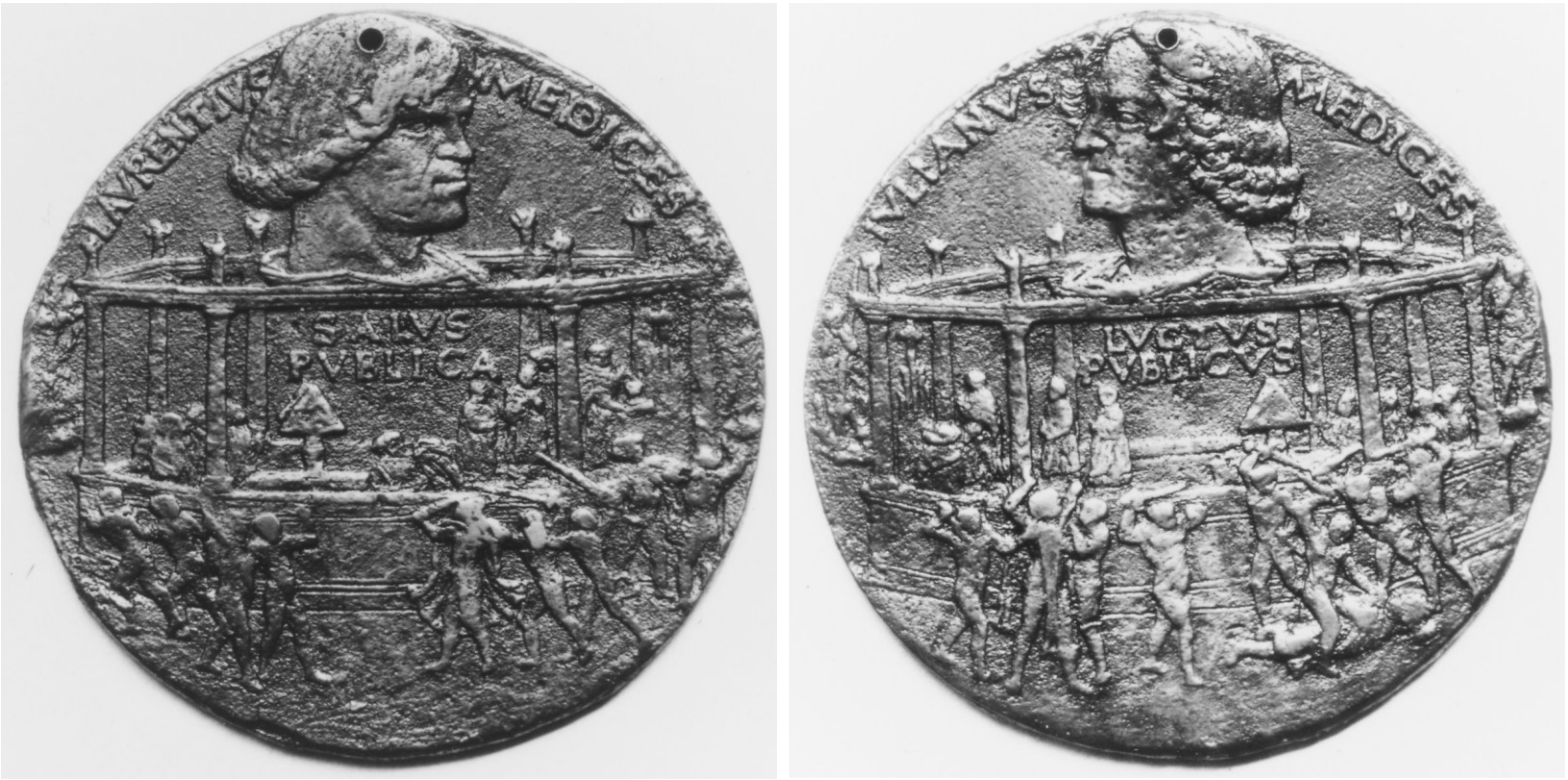
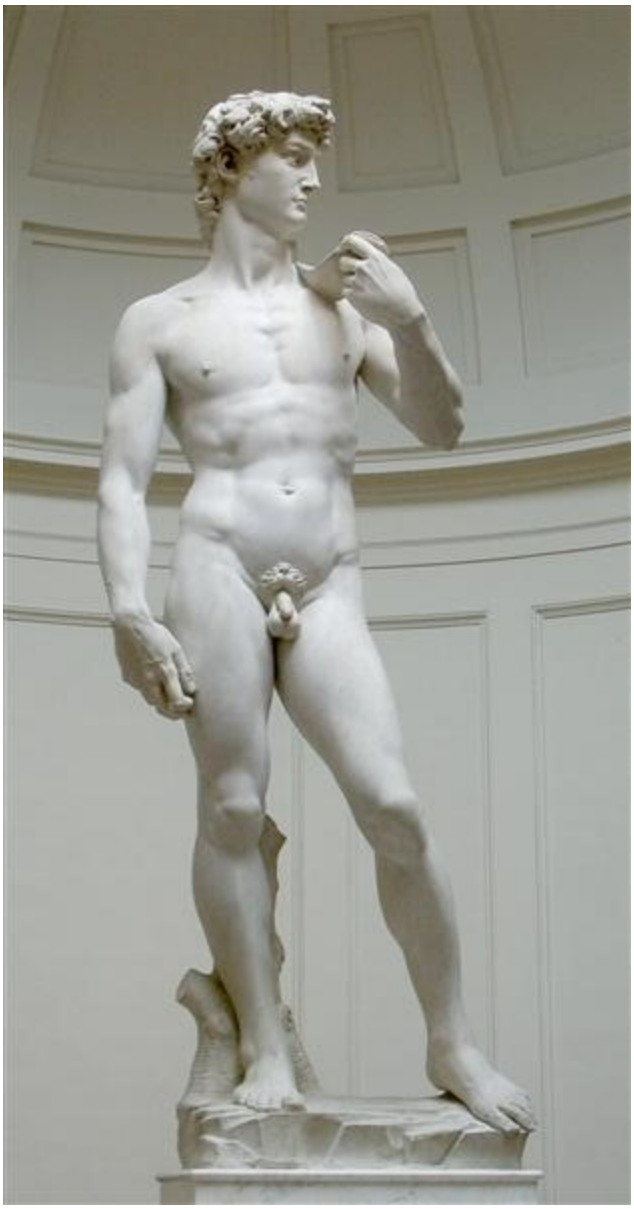
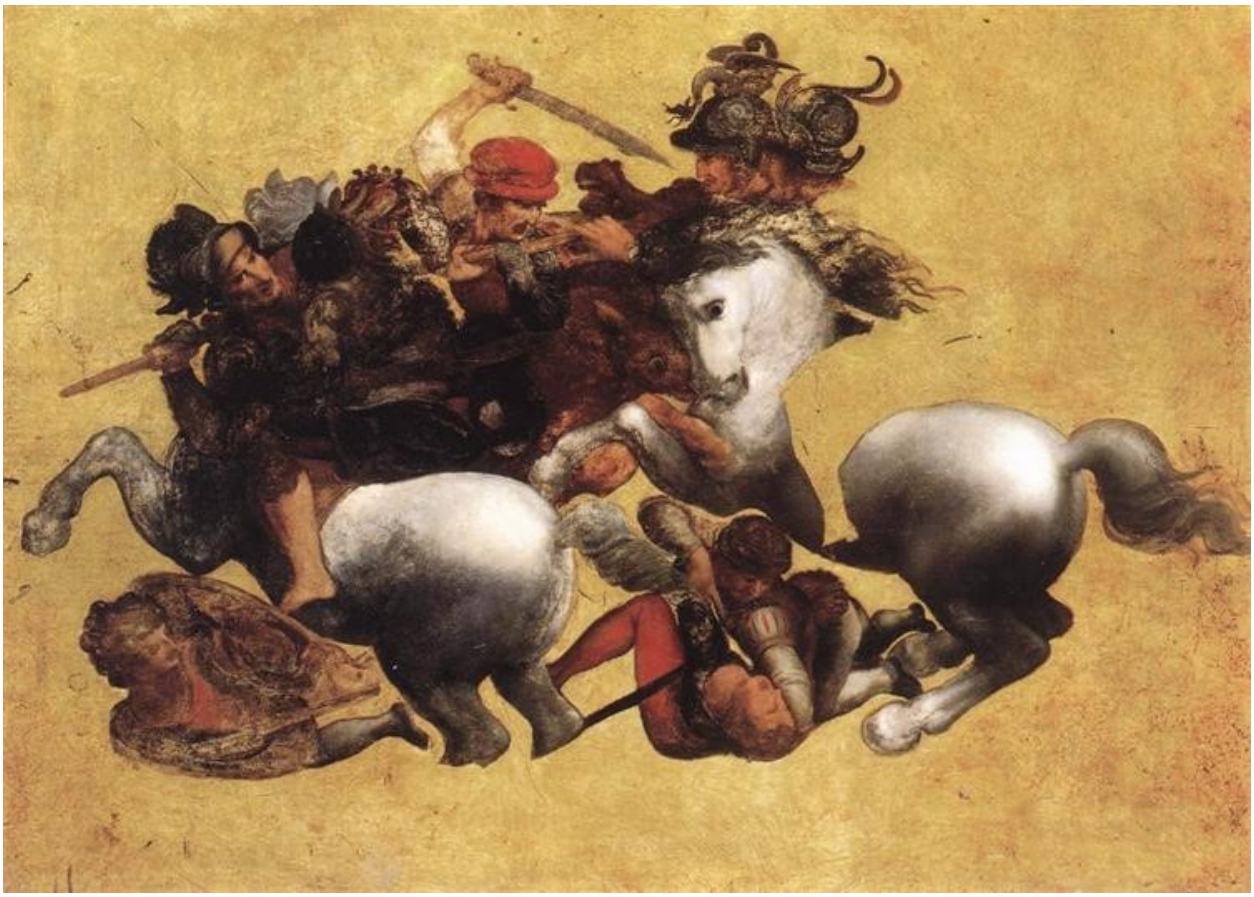


1 Bertoldo di Giovanni, *To Commemorate the Pazzi Conspiracy, 1478* (*Pazzi Conspiracy Medals*), Diameter: 2 1/2 in. (6.4 cm), Bronze, 1478; Florence, Italy, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

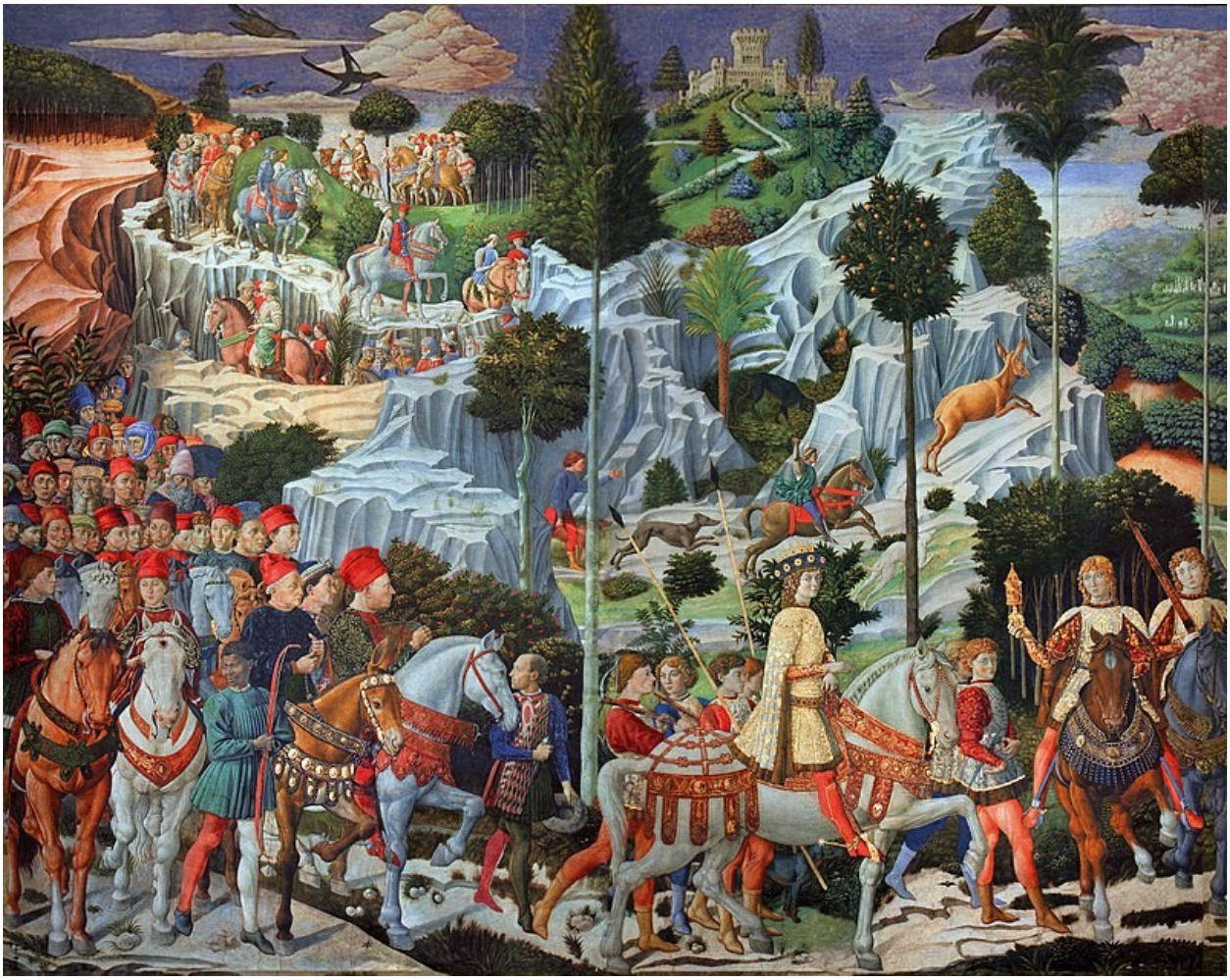


2 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *David*, 517 x 199 cm, marble, 1501 - 1504; Florence, Italy, Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze, Florence, Italy

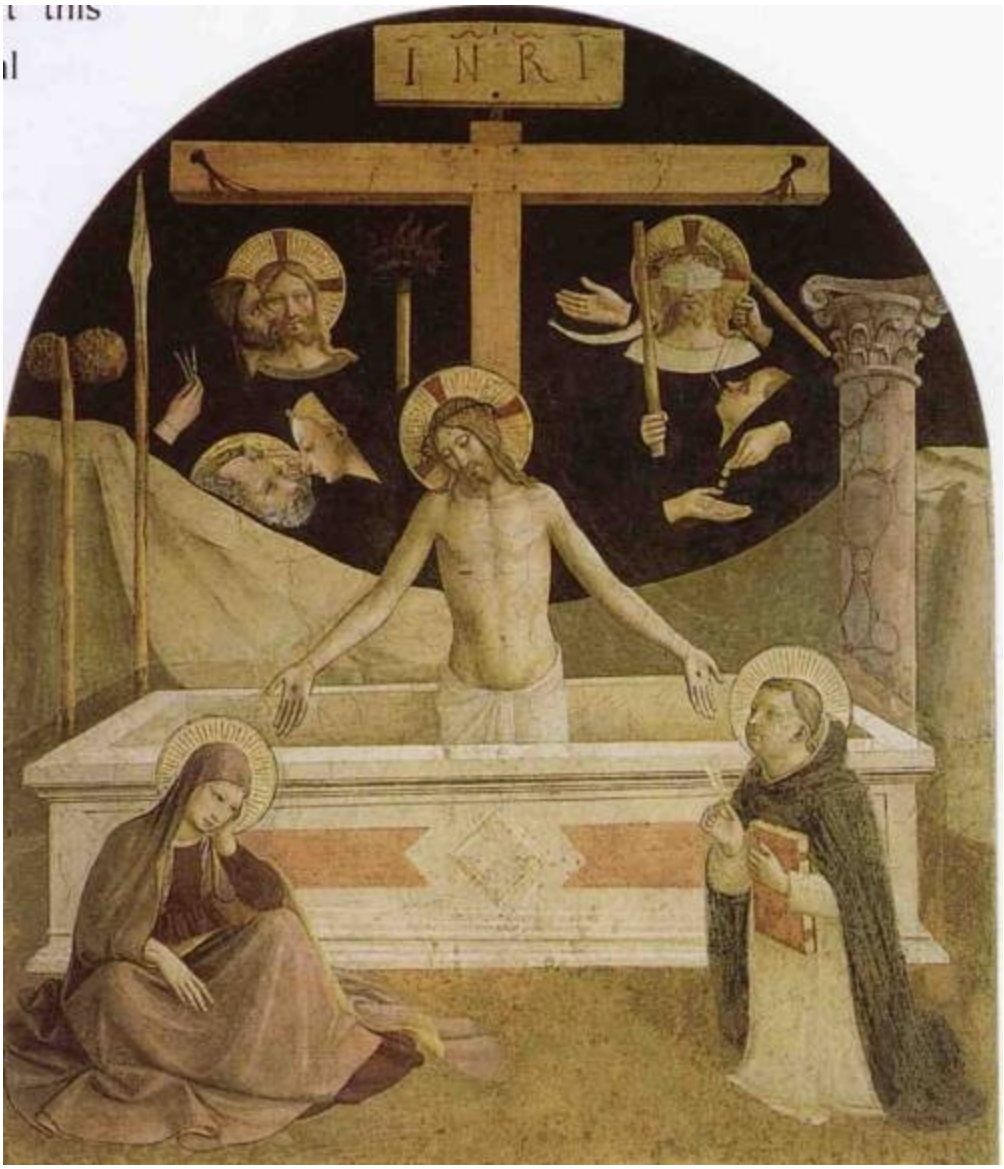


3 Leonardo Da Vinci, *Lotta per lo stendardo* (from the *Battle of Anghiari*), 85 x 115 cm, oil, panel, c.1503 - c.1505; Florence, Italy, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy

4 Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, chapel with frescoes by Benozzo Gozzoli, Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence



5 Benozzo Gozzoli, *The Journey of the Magi to Bethlehem* (east wall with cortege of the Medici), 1459, chapel, Palazzo Medici Riccardi, Florence



6 Fra Angelico and assistants (Benozzo Gozzoli?), *Homo Pietatis*, ca. 1438-45, fresco, Convento di San Marco, Florence

7 Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Virgin Adoring the Christ Child in the Wilderness with Saints John the Baptist and Romuald* (Palazzo Medici *Adoration*), 129.5 x 118 cm, egg tempera with oil glazes and gold on poplar, c. 1457, Gemaldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin