THE MEDICI PORTRAITS AND POLITICS 1512-1570

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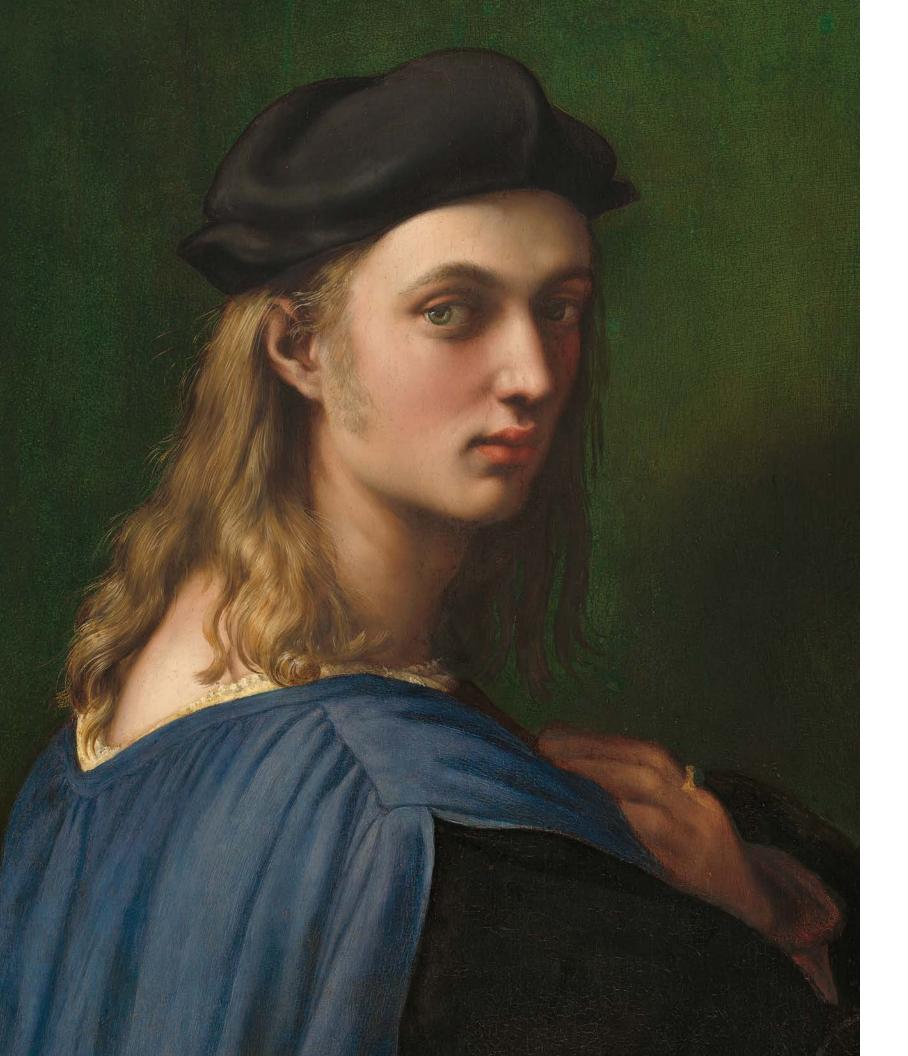
# THE MEDICI PORTRAITS AND POLITICS 1512-1570

EDITED BY Keith Christiansen and Carlo Falciani

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY Elizabeth Cropper, Davide Gasparotto, Sefy Hendler, Antonella Fenech Kroke, Tommaso Mozzati, Elizabeth Pilliod, Julia Siemon, Linda Wolk-Simon



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## THE POETICS OF PORTAITURE AND THE ACCADEMIA FIORENTINA

HEN Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, second son of Lorenzo il Magnifico, was elevated to the papacy on the 9th of March 1513, taking the name Leo X, it was the fulfillment of a prophesy made at the time of his birth in 1475 by the Neo-Platonic philosopher Marsilio Ficino, who had had foreseen his destiny in his auspicious horoscope.<sup>1</sup> Not only was he the shepherd of Christian souls (a sacred remit he discharged poorly, as Martin Luther was unafraid to pronounce); as pope, Leo X was also the family patriarch, resolved to restore the Medici to their traditional preeminence in the political affairs of Florence following their ignominious expulsion in 1494, and to advance their dynastic fortunes from his new seat of power in Rome. Pursuing these nepotistic objectives, he was aided by his cousin and close confidante Giulio de' Medici, illegitimate son of Lorenzo il Magnifico's brother Giuliano, who was made Cardinal, Vice-Chancellor of the Church, and Archbishop of Florence by the pope. When Cardinal Giulio followed Leo to the papacy as Clement VII in 1523 after the brief pontificate of Adrian VI (r. 1522–23), the agenda remained unchanged. From Rome, the eyes of the Medici popes were fixed on Florence.<sup>2</sup>

To craft the visual rhetoric of Leo's pontificate, a long-established repertoire of Medicean pictorial devices associated with Cosimo il Vecchio, Piero the Gouty, and Lorenzo il Magnifico—*palle* (balls), falcons, feathers, diamond rings, laurel branches—was harnessed.<sup>3</sup> To these were added bespoke Leonine emblems: a yoke accompanied by the motto SUAVE in reference to Jesus's words in the Gospel of Matthew, "for my yoke is easy [*suave*] and my burden is light" (11:30), and a lion, an allusion to his name but also to the *marzocco* (lion) of Florence, his avatar in the prophetic vision of his mother, Clarice Orsini, who dreamt before his birth that she was delivered of a lion in the Duomo of Florence.<sup>4</sup> These heraldic motifs appear in infinitely varied iterations in the art created for the pope, witnessed, for instance, in the borders of Raphael's *Acts of the Apostles* tapestries for the Sistine Chapel, which narrate his personal history as Cardinal, linking his destiny to the sweeping narrative of the church and the papacy (fig. 1). Paralleling this storehouse of visual symbols was a constellation of literary tropes that humanists, panegyrists and sycophants propagated to celebrate his papacy. Thus was Leo X hailed in sermons, pamphlets and poems as the bringer of peace following the reign of his predecessor, Julius II, the warrior pope; as the peace-loving Numa Pompilius, second king of ancient Rome, who succeeded the bellicose Romulus; as the *medicus* (doctor) who would heal

### Elizabeth Cropper



Fig. 00. Pontormo. *Man's Torso*. Marble,  $00 \times 00$  ( $00 \times 00$  cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

the scars of a war-torn Italy; and as the biblical Lion of Judah whose reign would usher in a new Golden Age.<sup>5</sup>

The myth-makers of Leo's pontificate acclaimed the election of a Medici to the throne of St. Peter as the felicitous union of Florence and Rome. Resounding with Lorenzo de Medici's exhortation to his son upon entering the cardinalate that he "should be the link to bind this city [Florence] closer to the church, and our family with the city,"<sup>6</sup> the conceit articulated the political ambition of the new pope to return the rule of Florence firmly to the Medici, now re-empowered, and on unassailable authority. In Leonine pageantry, the formulation was expressed as the joining of the ancient kingdoms of Etruria and Latium, signifying Florence and Rome respectively, under the reign of the god Saturn. This was the overarching program of the temporary theater erected on the Capitoline for one of the first ceremonies of Leo's pontificate, the conferring of Roman citizenship in September 1513 on his brother Giuliano (cat. 00) and, in absentia, his nephew Lorenzo (cat. 00), the two heirs on whom the dynastic

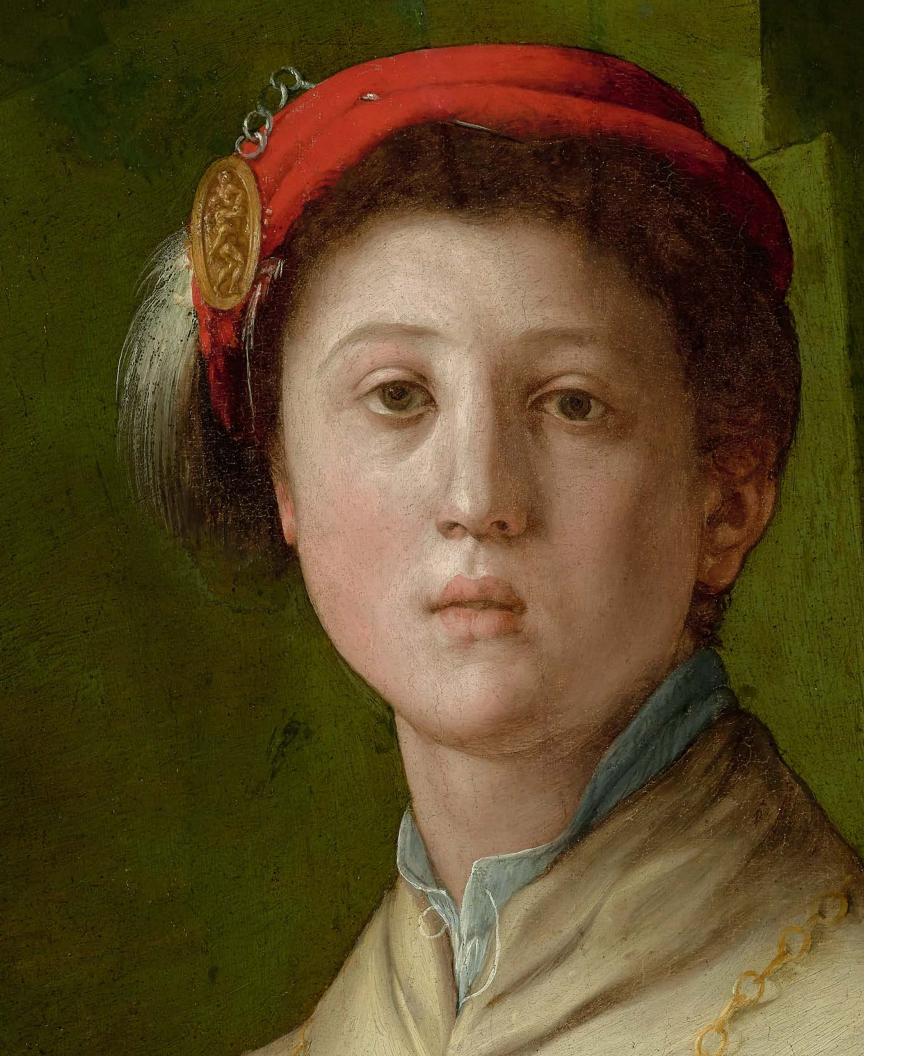
hopes of the Medici then rested: every aspect of the decoration underscored the ancient ties that bound the Romans and Etruscans, coalescing in the present in the person of the Medici pope and in his brother. Should those exalted claims seem specious, the audience was reminded that Leo and Giuliano, as the sons of Clarice Orsini, descendant of one of the most ancient and venerable Roman families, had Roman blood in their veins. This message was sounded by a woman wearing the head and pelt of a bear ("orso"—a reference to the Orsini name) and holding a gold *palla* and a laurel branch surmounted by gold lion, who addressed Giuliano with the words "by nature you are Tuscan, but by privilege you are Roman... two peoples conjoined by blood. My Rome is yours ... "7

The portrait of Giuliano de' Medici by Raphael's workshop (cat. 00) has as a background vignette the papal fortress Castel Sant'Angelo, located in the Borgo near the Vatican (fig. 2). Multiple meanings are telegraphed by the inclusion of this iconic feature of the urban landscape of Rome: Giuliano's Roman citizenship, his military role as commander of the papal troops, and the honorific Captain-General of the Church, conferred on him by the pope in 1515.8 Leading from the fortress in the distance to the exterior face of the wall behind Giuliano is the Passetto—the fortified corridor connecting the Vatican to Castel Sant'Angelo.

The topographically accurate view of these structures through the open window establishes that the setting, non-descript though it may be, is the interior of the Vatican palace, Giuliano's residence during his years in Rome by leave of his brother, the pope—an unseen but implicit presence from whom Giuliano's rank and station derived. The portrait's intended recipient is unknown, but the fact that it is painted on canvas rather than panel, making it easy to transport, suggests that it was meant to be sent elsewhere from Rome, bearing its message that this Medici scion was invested with power that originated and extended beyond the narrow walls of his native Florence.

Leo X was also unseen, in person at least, at the festivities celebrating the marriage of his nephew Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, to Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne staged in Florence in September 1518. For that momentous occasion his absence was compensated for by a portrait: Raphael's celebrated Leo *X with Two Cardinals,* which depicts the pope in the company of his right-hand man, Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, and Cardinal Luigi de' Rossi, another Medici relation (fig. 3). Though almost certainly not painted expressly for this purpose (it is on heavy panel rather Fig. 00. Pontormo. Saint Anne. Oil on canvas,  $00 \times 00$  ( $00 \times 00$  cm). than canvas and so not easily portable, and the pope Musée du Louvre, Paris. is attired in winter garb even though the celebrations took place in late summer), the portrait was hurriedly dispatched from Rome, documents show, in order to be installed at the nuptial banquet at Palazzo Medici. Surrounded by precious and costly objects attesting to the refined taste and discernment of his Medici lineage and displaying the small white hands he vainly prided, Leo is seated at a table (a Medici *palla* performing the role of chair finial)—a pose that conveniently would have heightened the desired impression that he was in attendance and presiding over the celebration. (Awkwardly inserted into the composition, the two cardinals were not part of the original conception, and were presumably added once it was decided to send the portrait to Florene as a surrogate for its subjects.) The presence of the pope and Cardinal Giulio, the family power brokers in Rome, was essential for impressing on the assembled citizens of Florence the immutable authority on which Lorenzo, the last legitimate male heir of the senior branch of the Medici, had been groomed to be the city's ruler—a reminder that anti-Medicean and republican factions would not have applauded.





## POLITICS, PORTRAITURE, AND THE MEDICI POPES, I5I3-34

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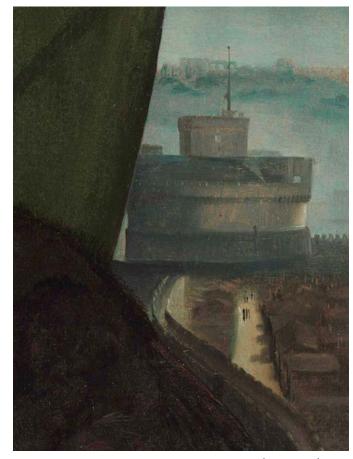


Fig. 00. Pontormo. Saint Anne. Oil on canvas,  $oo \times oo$  ( $oo \times oo$  cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

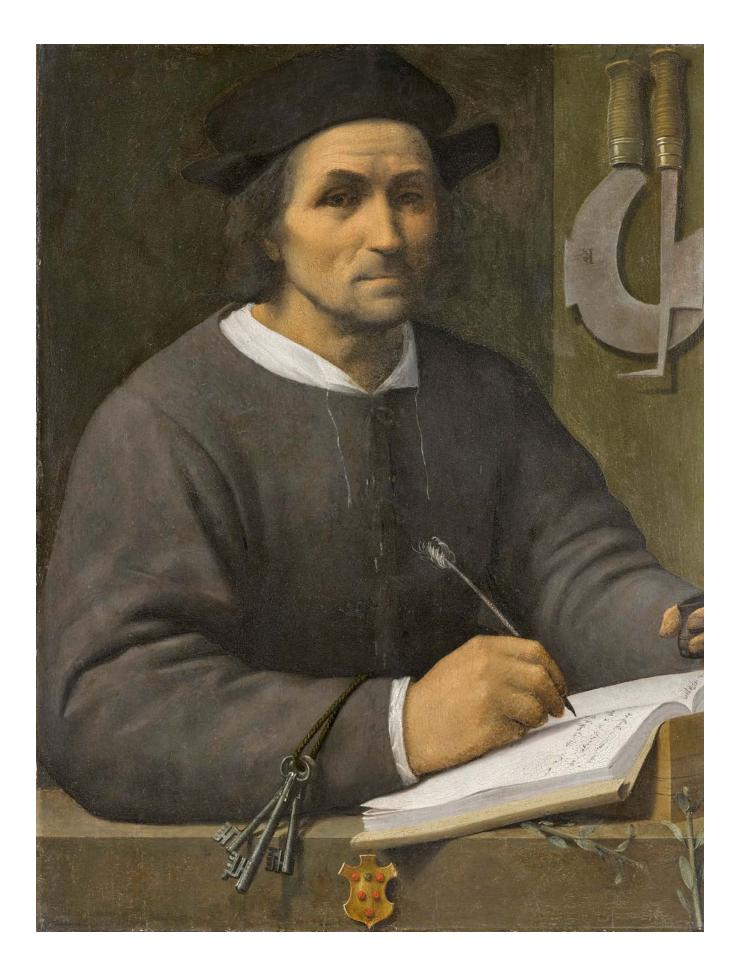


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Franciabigio (Francesco di Cristofano di Francesco) (Italian, Rome 1484–1525 Rome)

#### 01. Jacopo Cennini, 1523

Oil on panel,  $oo \times oo$  in.  $(65.4 \times 49.6 \text{ cm})$ Inscribed: on the pruning hook, with the artist's monogram, MDXXIII; on the pages of the ledger, ... flore ... ogi adi 20 ... /... si girolamo The Royal Collection (RCIN 405766)

Franciabigio painted not only for the Medici—most famously contributing to the cycle of frescoes at Poggio a Caiano carried out together with Andrea del Sarto and Pontormo-but also for those of more modest social standing. The two portraits Vasari remarks upon in his life of the artist were of "a dear friend [amicissimo], Matteo Sofferoni," about whom nothing is known, and "a workman and estate manager [fattore] for Pierfrancesco de' Medici at the palace of San Girolamo at Fiesole, which seems alive ... " (Vasari 1550 and 1568/1966-87, vol. 00 [date], p. 513). The first is sometimes associated with a portrait in the Gemäldegalerie, Berlin; the latter is identifiable with the present portrait. It is first recorded in 1639 in the collection of Charles I, when it was ascribed to Andrea del Sarto and described as "some harborest of the familye of the house of Medecey." John Shearman (1968, pp. 104–6) identified the sitter as Jacopo Cennini, who held the position of estate manager at the Medici villa at Fiesole. In July 1523—the year the portrait was painted—Cennini wrote his counterpart in Florence concerning instructions he had received from Pierfrancesco de' Medici (1487-1525) about improvements to the Fiesole estate. Pierfrancesco took a personal interest in the running of his properties, which included the celebrated villa at Cafaggiolo as well as the smaller property at Fiesole, with its vineyard, olive grove, and quarry (see Pieraccini 1924–25/1986, vol. 1, pp. 361–63; Shearman 1975, p. 15).

At first glance the portrait might seem a rather straightforward depiction, perfectly suited to the social standing of the sitter, who came from a respectable but far from eminent family and held a position of modest importance. On closer inspection, however, it proves to be ingeniously programmed. Soberly attired, the serious-faced Cennini looks up with raised eyebrow from behind a parapet, as though interrupted while dutifully writing entries in the open ledger set before him. In one hand, he holds an ink pot, in the other, a quiver. A set of three keys, emblematic of the managerial position he holds, hangs from a cord draped over his right arm, while behind him, on the wall of the cramped, barren room, are two garden tools: a pruning hook and a bill-hook (see Remington 2015, p. 57). Whereas Franciabigio's monogram modestly appears on the pruning hook—as though affirming

his own humble background—the front face of the parapet is decorated with the colorful Medici coat of arms (five red palle and one blue one depicted on a gold shield), affirming the family on whom Cennini's position depended. Additionally, there are two stems of laurel, which, as Shearman (date, p. 00) noted, "may pass as the casual results of [Cennini's] pruning, but in any Medicean context . . . must mean much more, being the familiar symbols of the truncation and renewal of the branches of the family." Cleanly cut at a sharp angle, the stems have been readied for planting and regeneration. Shearman was surely correct in seeing their inclusion as signifying two distinct dynastic branches of the Medici and the restoration of the power of the principal branch.

Pierfrancesco belonged to the junior, or cadet, branch of the Medici family, which traced its descent not from Cosimo il Vecchio and Lorenzo the Magnificent but from Cosimo's brother, Lorenzo. Pierfrancesco's grandfather had served the Republic, eventually breaking with his kinsman, Piero the Gouty. His son, Lorenzo "il popolano," had, once again, supported the Republic following the Medici's exile from the city in 1494. After their restoration in 1512, Pierfrancesco managed a reconciliation with his kinsmen but withdrew from active politics. When elected in 1523 as Pope Clement VII (see cat. 00), Giulio de' Medici—the bastard son of Lorenzo the Magnificent's brother, Giuliano-promoted as Medici representatives in Florence the thirteen-yearold Ippolito and Alessandro (each a bastard but of the senior Medicean line), effectively sidetracking Pierfrancesco. The two laurel cuttings—one upright, the other pointing toward it from its place under the ledger—were possibly intended as emblematic references to the two branches of the family: as Shearman (date, p. 00) has remarked, "one is upright and prominent, the other, Pierfrancesco's, is down and, as it were, in eclipse under the ledger." A biblical analogy is the dream of Joseph, in which his brothers' sheaves of wheat bowed down to his, which "stood upright" (Genesis 37:7). But if this is the meaning, there was a twist in subsequent events, for in 1532, Alessandro became duke (see cat. 00), only to be assassinated in 1537 by his cousin, Lorenzino, the son of Pierfrancesco. Why Cennini would have wanted these Medicean allusions in his portrait remains an open question.

Vasari saw in Franciabigio's work what, for him, were the praiseworthy but limiting qualities of diligence and frankness (*diligenza* and *franchezza*), both of which, like the artist's dutiful mastery of perspective, linked Franciabigio with longstanding Florentine traditions rather than with the inventive freedom of his sometimes partner, Andrea del Sarto, and the next generation of artists. As Susan McKillop (date, p. 00) has suggested, he may have been aware of Raphael's portrait of Tommaso Inghirami, prefect of the Palatine Library (Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence), which he could have seen during a conjectured trip to

Pontormo's *Portrait of Two Friends* is usually dated to 1523–24, when Florence was ravaged by the plague. The artist retreated to the Certosa at Galuzzo in the Florentine countryside in 1523, remaining there through 1525. If this presumed chronology is correct, then the portrait was executed during the plague, either just before Pontormo's (and his friends'?) departure from the insalubrious city, or conceivably even at the Certosa. Interestingly, a study for the hand holding the paper, transcribed without revision in the painting, is found on the verso of a drawing that has been dated to the time of the Certosa frescoes (Cox-Rearick 1981, p. 00, no. 193 [verso], and p. 00, no. 236 [recto]). Situated against this backdrop, the portrait does indeed conjure absent friends. Cicero's encomium to friendship, penned in the form of a letter, exhorts the recipient to remember that friendship is constant and "ever at your side," even in absence.

If this proposed context is correct, then Pontormo and his friends, as avid readers of the Tuscan poets, may well have found in Boccaccio's *Decameron*—tales told by Florentines adjourning to the countryside to escape the plague—a poetic portent of their own circumstances. LWS

SELECTED REFERENCES: Vasari, TK; CXXX Sisi, in *Officina della maniera* 1996, pp. 296–97, no. 104; Pilliod 2001, p. 90; Cropper 2004, pp. 17–19; Strehlke 2004, pp. 64–66, no. 5; Carol Plazzotta, in *Renaissance Faces* 2008 [**CONF**], p. 172, no. 44; Beuzelin 2009; Andrea Baldinotti, in Falciani and Natali 2014, pp. 132–33, no. IV.1.3; Dennis Geronimus, in Eclercy 2016, pp. 94–95, no. 26; Wolk-Simon 2018, pp. 386–87

#### Rosso Fiorentino (DATES TK)

#### 03. Portrait of a Man, ca. 1522

Oil on wood,  $oo \times oo$  in.  $(88.7 \times 67.9 \text{ cm})$ National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Although in his life of the artist Vasari (1550 and 1568/1966-87, vol. 00 [date], p. 476) attests that portraits by Rosso could be seen throughout Florence in the homes of its citizens, he describes none, and only a few can be ascribed to him today with confidence. It is indicative of their range and individual character that all works currently attributed to him were once given to other artists. The National Gallery's portrait, introduced into the literature in 1951 by Roberto Longhi, is universally accepted. It is generally dated to about 1522, which makes it contemporary with Rosso's altarpiece for the Dei family in Santo Spirito, Florence (now in the Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti), a work that Vasari (1550 and 1568/1966-87, vol. 00 [date], p. 476) says was thought to be extraordinary for "the boldness of the figures and the abstract character of their poses, not yet employed by others." This assessment is equally valid for the Washington portrait, which sets the stage for what we might—following Vasari—think of as a portrait

of attitude. The sitter stands at an angle, with one arm akimbo, the lateral-falling light grazing the upper edge of his hand. The other hand he holds in a self-consciously casual position suggestive of what, in the <portraits?> of Bronzino and Salviati, will become courtly sprezzatura: that "well-bred negligence born of complete self-possession" (Shearman 1967, p. 21). With parted lips—as though he is about to, but not yet, speak—the sitter strikes an expression of reserved detachment as he casts a disinterested gaze at the viewer. His broad-brimmed hat—of a type worn by the sitter in a portrait of 1522 by Franciabigio (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin)—and expansive silhouette fill the picture space, asserting his physical dominance. David Franklin (1994, p. 224) has perceptively noted that, "By breaking the immobility of the pose and adding vitality to the face, Rosso undermines the purpose for many renaissance portraits, which was to provide a permanent, timeless record of a sitter." Franklin reasonably suggests that Rosso derived his idea from Raphael's portrait of Lorenzo de' Medici (cat. 00), and this seems even more likely when we recall that the Dei altarpiece had been commissioned to Raphael, who left it unfinished when he departed for Rome. The commission cannot have failed to focus the artist's attention on his great predecessor. Nevertheless, it is worth recalling that the arm akimbo already appears in late fifteenth-century painting and sculpture—which Rosso seems to have studied as a means of finding his own voice—perhaps most prominently in Verrocchio's bronze statue of David and Goliath, where the pose clearly conveys youthful pride. That is also the meaning conveyed in Pontormo's Halberdier (cat. 00) and Bronzino's Portrait of a Man (cat. 00). In the first, the sitter, Francesco Guardi, holds a halberd in his other hand whereas in the second it is a book, thus converting what in Rosso's picture is an expressively neutral gesture into a signifier of political and cultural identity.

What about the sitter in the Washington portrait? Herbert Keutner (1959, pp. 141-44) made an unconvincing attempt to identify him with the musician Francesco dell'Ajolle (1492–1540), who had Cellini as a pupil and eventually moved to Lyon, where in 1522 he received compatriots who had fled Florence for their anti-Medicean activities. We know his likeness from portraits by Andrea del Sarto and Pier Francesco Foschi (Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence). Nevertheless, the idea that the sitter could be among those with republican sympathies is tantalizing. Carlo Falciani (in Officina della maniera 1996, p. 358) has conjectured that when Vasari refers to the "cittadini" whose portraits Rosso painted, he was indicating those republican-minded Florentines who contributed to the exile of the Medici. He further noted that Rosso seems not to have painted for the Medici "but only for aristocrats like Carlo Ginori [the patron of Rosso's altarpiece in San Lorenzo], who for his entire life was devoted to Savonarola and the old civic



of a Goldsmith to Salviati's first Roman period (see Philippe Costamagna, in Monbeig Goguel 1998, p. 224), the picture seems, instead, utterly Florentine: both the unaffected pose and the lapidary treatment of the folds of the drapery hark back to Andrea del Sarto, with whom Salviati spent time prior to leaving for Rome in 1530, and to his early training by his uncle Diaceto, who was a goldsmith. An analogy for the composition might be drawn with Sarto's *Portrait of a Prelate* (cat. 00) as well as to Pontormo's *Portrait of a Goldsmith* (Musée du Louvre, Paris; see Sefy Hendler, in Falciani and Natali 2014, p. 102, no.III.1). While the possibility that it was painted in Rome between 1530 and 1538 cannot be discounted, there is good reason to suggest that this is actually an early work, painted prior to 1530 and thus during the period of the Florentine Republic.

According to Vasari, who befriended Salviati when they were both still apprentices, Salviati painted portraits from a very early date. Moreover, he had a circle of close friends that included both painters and goldsmiths. Vasari tells us that they would meet together on holidays and go about Florence drawing the works they most admired. Among those he names is Francesco di Girolamo Ortensi, known as Francesco del Prato (1512–1562), a medallist, painter, and goldsmith who "cast little figures in bronze" (Vasari 1550 and 1568/1966-87, vol. 5 [date], pp. 511, 520), and Manno di Sebastiano Sbarri (d. 1576)—"grandissimo amico"-for whom Salviati later furnished drawings for various Farnese projects (ibid., pp. 513, 533; see also Riebesell, in Monbeig Goguel 1998, pp. 248–58). The sitter in the portrait would seem to be in his twenties, however, and thus too old to be identified with these young companions of the artist. The gilded-bronze statuette of a nude female relates to Salviati's youthful veneration for Michelangelo and to his study of, for example, the statue of Dawn for the Medici Chapel, which he studied from a variety of angles—possibly in the company of Vasari even before it was installed, in 1546 (see Joannides, in Monbeig Goguel 1998, p. 96). The figure of a woman nursing her child in the fresco of the Visitation of 1538 strikes a related pose and reminds of the overlap that existed between Salviati's training as a goldsmith, his practice as a painter, and his designs for other goldsmiths. That said, the statuette as an indicator of profession belongs to the realm of republican portraiture rather than the later, formal portraits incorporating sculpture, props, or allegorical figures as poetically conceived allusions (see cats. 00, 00). KC

SELECTED REFERENCES: Voss 1920/1997, vol. 1, p. 201; Alazard 1925, p. 187; Venturi 1933, pp. 206–7; Mortari 1950, p. 150, no. 127; Cheney 1963, vol. 2, pp. 421, 493; Philippe Costamagna, in Monbeig Goguel 1998, p. 224, no. 83 Bronzino (Agnolo di Cosimo Mariano di Tori, Monticello 1503—1572 Florence)

#### o8. Portrait of a Woman with a Lapdog, ca. 1532-33

Oil on wood, oo × oo in. (89.8 × 70.5 cm) Städel Museum, Frankfurt (no. 1136)

Pier Francesco Foschi (Florence 1502–1567 Florence)

#### 09. *Portrait of a Lady,* ca. 1530–35

Oil on panel, 00 × 00 in. (101 × 79 cm) Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid (no. 145, 1935.16)

Together with the Metropolitan Museum's Portrait of a Young *Man* (cat. 00), the *Woman with a Lapdog* in Frankfurt is among the works in which Bronzino laid the groundwork for the sophisticated poetics of portraiture that was to inform all his subsequent painting. As in his poetry, where the model of Petrarch is both appropriated and subverted (Parker 2000, pp. 53-54), so, too, in this picture the artist deliberately reaches beyond Andrea del Sarto's marvelous Portrait of a Young Woman Reading Petrarch (Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence) to reference such canonical models as Leonardo's Mona Lisa and Raphael's portrait of Maddalena Doni (Galleria Palatina, Florence). Like the latter, Bronzino shows his sitter in a chair with the armrest set parallel to the picture plane. The sitter's head is turned toward the viewer, her hands artfully arranged to suggest a self-conscious composure, her imperturbable countenance relieved by the hint of an incipient smile. The brilliantly rendered clothes, emblematic of her social status, seem almost to transform her body into a heraldic glyph. She appears at once to acknowledge the viewer's presence while remaining aloof, exhibiting that Dantesque quality of unattainable perfection. In these ways, and despite the endearing presence of a carefully groomed spaniel nestled in her lap, Bronzino transformed his sitter into a marmoreal idol of virtue and beauty framed by a niche flanked by pilasters employing the Tuscan order. As Charles McCorquodale (1981, p. 23) has written, "how assured she is, how urbane the turning of her head and shoulders to confer upon her audience a passive but commanding gaze. She must have been among the first of Bronzino's sitters whom he endowed with that remote, self-absorbed stillness where, despite the irresistible tangibility of every detail ..., personality has begun to withdraw. In the portraits of the following decade, this was to be perfected to the point where nothing was permitted to remain which would disturb the persona constructed exclusively from immaculate externals."

Robert Simon (1982, pp. 197–200) suggested identifying Bronzino's sitter with Maria Salviati (1499–1543), the mother of



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