

# HISTORY *of* ITALIAN ART

VOLUME ONE



Preface by Peter Burke

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In this edition references to English-language sources have been given where possible. In some foreign works not readily available in English, references to the Italian editions used by the authors have been retained.

# Preface

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The *History of Italian Art* is one of a number of ambitious projects associated with the Italian publisher Einaudi. Giulio Einaudi, who founded the publishing house, is the son of Luigi Einaudi, the first president of the Italian Republic, and a flamboyant personality who likes to do everything on a grand scale. In the 1970s, he embarked on a series of large-scale projects. The *Einaudi Encyclopaedia*, for example, is not the usual kind of reference work but rather a fourteen-volume collection of essays, sometimes by distinguished intellectuals such as Roland Barthes and Leszek Kolakowski, on themes running from 'Abacus' to 'Zero'.

However, even the *Einaudi Encyclopaedia* looks relatively modest and compact when it is placed alongside the multivolume histories from the same publisher; for the *History of Italian Art*, published in twelve volumes between 1979 and 1982, is only the second part of a trilogy. The first part takes the form of a *History of Italy*, which appeared in six volumes (1972–6), followed by no fewer than eighteen supplementary volumes (nine of them dealing with major themes in Italian history and nine with the history of different regions). The third part of the trilogy is a *History of Italian Literature* in another twelve volumes (1982–91).

All three projects have a distinctive style. For example, all of them emphasize social factors. The academic editors include a number of leading Italian Marxists, such as Ruggiero Romano and Alberto Asor Rosa, who ensured that the relation between the history of

Italian culture and economic, social and political trends would be explored in depth and in detail. One of the volumes of the *History of Italian Literature*, for example, is entitled 'Production and Consumption', while the *History of Italian Art* includes a similar volume on 'The Artist and the Public'. Another model for these projects has been the so-called 'Annales School' of French historians, especially their emphasis on a 'total history' which reveals the connections between activities as different as painting, politics, philosophy, and so on.

The teams of scholars recruited to write all three histories – like the *Encyclopaedia* – include a number of foreigners as well as Italians. The French are particularly prominent in this respect. It is some indication of the prestige of the project that the late Fernand Braudel should have agreed to write a long chapter for the *History of Italy* on the theme of 'Italians outside Italy'. Another member of the *Annales* group, the distinguished French medievalist Jacques Le Goff, has also participated in a number of these Einaudi projects, while Nicole Dacos has contributed an essay on 'Italian Art and the Art of Antiquity' (below, pp. 113–213). English scholars, a remarkable number of whom specialize in the study of Italy, are also relatively prominent in this series of projects. The *History of Italy* contains long contributions by Philip Jones and Stuart Woolf, while the *History of Italian Art* includes an essay by Francis Haskell on the dispersal and conservation of works of art (below, pp. 214–69).

Another common feature of these volumes is their concern for long-term trends. The first volume of the *History of Italy*, subtitled 'The specific characteristics' (*I caratteri originali*), in homage to the French historian Marc Bloch and his *Caractères originaux de l'histoire rurale française* (1931), is concerned, in a Braudelian manner with trends over the very long term. The volume includes an essay by Carlo Ginzburg – an author who has long been associated with Einaudi – dealing with 'folklore, magic and religion' in Italy over a period of more than 1,000 years. Ginzburg has also participated in the *History of Italian Art*. In collaboration with the art historian Enrico Castelnuovo, he is the author of a highly original exploration of the theme of 'Centre and Periphery' in Italian art, in other words the problem of provincialism, once more a study of changes over the long term (below, pp. 29–112).

The interest in concepts and methods, the welcome given to new ideas, and the interdisciplinary approach are indeed characteristic features of the Einaudi projects. They may be illustrated by the perceptive essay by Salvatore Settis, in the now controversial area of

iconography (vol. II, pp. 119–259); by the iconoclastic piece by Giovanni Previtali, who undertakes to rethink the periodization of Italian art (vol. II, pp. 1–118); or by Anna Maria Mura's discussion of art and its public in terms of semiotics and reception theory (below, pp. 270–324).

It should be clear that despite their scale, the aim of the collective trilogy on Italian history, art and literature is not to be complete, scientific or objective, but rather to present a moving object from a diversity of viewpoints. Even a rigorous selection like the one submitted here, offering ten essays in the place of twelve volumes, still gives an impression of that diversity. In Italy, the three projects, launched with great publicity, were a great stimulus to scholarly debate. It is not too much to expect that this selection will have a similar effect in the English-speaking world.

*Peter Burke*

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# The Italian Artist and his Roles

PETER BURKE

WHAT is an artist? If the question is a historical one, there is no point in looking up a dictionary. A static definition is useless because the social roles, and hence the identities of painters and sculptors – I shall be saying little about architects – have changed a good deal in the last 800 years. The public has looked at artists, and artists have looked at themselves, in very different ways. Their recruitment and training, their position in society, the opportunities open to them, the pressures on them have all varied in different periods.

This essay attempts to sketch the history of Italian artists. It is a sketch for *une histoire de longue durée*, from the twelfth century to the twentieth; or if you like your dates more precise, from 1178 (when Antelami signed and dated a relief of the *Deposition of Christ* for Parma cathedral), to 1978. The main theme will be the historian's favourite, the relative importance of change and continuity. What is attempted here will be a sketch rather than a finished picture, not only because of the space allotted, but also because of the state of research in this area. Little is known, and in all probability little can be known, about Italian artists in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. For the period 1300–1800 we are much better informed, thanks to the work of Wackernagel and Antal, Haskell and the Wittkowers, to mention only the best-known studies.<sup>1</sup> Yet even here much remains to be discovered, and we are still in danger of seeing the career of the ordinary artist in terms of the best-known,

an illusion which can be corrected only by quantitative methods, by the prosopographical approach.<sup>2</sup> As for the period after 1800, although by far the best-documented, it is, from the point of view of the social historian of Italian art, still virtually *terra incognita*.<sup>3</sup>

So much for the basic problems involved in making a study of this kind. On the other hand, there is probably no country in the world where so much information was recorded about the lives and personalities of artists between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries as Italy. One thinks inevitably of Vasari, but also of his many imitators and continuators, painters and antiquarians, who were concerned to show that their century and their city (Rome or Venice, Bologna or Genoa) was a worthy rival and successor to Vasari's Florence; Giovanni Baglione, Carlo Ridolfi, Giovan Pietro Bellori, Raffaello Soprani, Carlo Cesare Malvasia, Gianbattista Passeri, and Lione Pascoli, to name only the most celebrated.<sup>4</sup> Even the faces of a good many seventeenth-century artists are known to us, thanks to the famous collection of self-portraits in the Uffizi, assembled, and sometimes commissioned, by Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici and his agents, including another biographer of artists, Filippo Baldinucci. There are also vivid literary self-portraits, such as the *Commentari* of Ghiberti, the autobiography of Cellini, and, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the memoirs of artists such as Hayez, de Nittis, Costa, Fattori, Duprè, Carrà, Severini or de Chirico.<sup>5</sup> Thanks to all this material, it ought to be possible at least to make a beginning.

This sketch of the social history of the Italian artist presents five main figures, types or roles. There is the artist as craftsman; the artist as courtier; the artist as entrepreneur; the artist as civil servant; and finally the artist as rebel. As a useful simplification, one might say that these five roles have been dominant in turn between the twelfth and the twentieth centuries, although at any one time two or more roles have usually coexisted, and some artists acted out more than one of them. For reasons of space, I shall pass over two relatively small groups of artists who do not fit into this typology; clerical artists, like the Dominican Fra Angelico, the Jesuit Andrea Pozzo, and the Theatine architect Guarino Guarini; and women artists, like Properzia de' Rossi, Sofonisba Anguisciola and Rosalba Carriera.<sup>6</sup>

### The artist as craftsman

In the Middle Ages, the main role which the men whom we call artists were expected and trained to fill was that of craftsman. The

distinction between *belle arti* (fine art) and *arti meccaniche* (mechanical arts) did not yet exist, and Sacchetti, for example, could refer to 'Buonamico dipintore' as 'buono artista della sua arte' in the sense of 'buono artigiano nella sua mestiere' (a good artist in his craft).<sup>7</sup> This role was fairly unspecialized. A painter might find himself painting not only panels but also beds, chairs, saddles, armour, *cassoni*, birth trays or inn signs, as well as frescoing walls, selling his work, and training his apprentices. Sculptors were even more involved in entrepreneurial activities than painters because of the cost of their raw materials, bronze or marble. A fifteenth-century Florentine sculptor would probably be expected to arrange for the quarrying of marble from Carrara as well as for turning that marble into a statue.<sup>8</sup>

Like other craftsmen, painters and sculptors kept workshops (*botteghe*), where works were both made and sold. The *bottega* was composed of a small group of men working more or less in collaboration. Hence paintings and sculptures were usually anonymous, and when they were signed, the function of the signature was probably to guarantee the product rather than to express the pride of an individual creator. It is likely that 'Giotto signed those major products of his workshop which he himself had not painted. These were the works that were in need of the protection of a signature to prove their provenance.' The same system operated in Venice as late as the sixteenth century.<sup>9</sup> It was the *bottega* rather than the individual which had a style.

This *bottega* was often a family business in the case of painters and sculptors as in that of tailors or smiths. Jacopo Bellini worked with his sons Gentile and Giovanni and his son-in-law Mantegna. The della Robbia terracotta sculpture business involved Luca, his nephew Andrea, and no less than five of Andrea's sons. However, outsiders would often be taken into the *bottega*, and indeed into the family, of a successful craftsman. Fathers would apprentice their children to him, particularly fathers who themselves exercised some craft. Peasants were unlikely to be able to afford the fees for apprenticeship, while noble families sometimes objected to their young men becoming mere painters or sculptors. Condivi records that when the young Michelangelo abandoned 'le lettere' for Ghirlandaio's *bottega*, 'his father and uncles, who hated that craft, looked askance on him and often beat him severely, because to them (ignorant as they were of the excellence and nobility of the art), it seemed shameful to have it in the family.'<sup>10</sup>

The apprentices (known as *garzoni* or *discepoli*) were usually under fourteen years of age and might be only seven. They would learn

their trade by copying drawings from the workshop collection, drawings which were used as patterns, elements (like figures or buildings) which could be combined in different ways according to need. They would also do odd jobs like grinding the colours until they were ready to assist the older men in the more difficult tasks. When their apprenticeship was over, the young men could remain in the *bottega* as *lavoranti* (journeymen), or they could set up shop on their own. To reduce expenses and provide a kind of insurance against illness it was not uncommon for painters to form a temporary association or *compagnia*, sharing profits and expenses, as, for example, Fede di Nalduccio and Lando di Stefano agreed to do in Siena in 1384. This partnership was made for a year. Fede, who owned the *bottega*, was to deduct his expenses, and the remaining profit was to be shared between the two men.<sup>11</sup>

Although it was the fundamental unit of production, the *bottega* was not, of course, autonomous. Its members had to join a guild (*arte, fraglia*), which was a federation of *botteghe* within a given city with its own officials (*camerlenghi, gastaldi* etc.) and its own regulations. For example, it was normal practice for painters' and sculptors' guilds, or the guilds of which they formed a part (like the *Medici e Speciali* at Florence, to which the painters belonged), to order their members not to use inferior materials, not to steal *discepoli* or *lavoranti* from one another, and not to work on the feast-days ordained by the Church. The guild would also prevent 'forestieri', outsiders to the city, from working within it without paying a special fee, and they might give or lend money to members who were sick or in prison. Thus subscriptions to a guild represented a form of insurance. Religious and social functions were also performed by guilds or by separate associations (*confraternite, scuole, compagnie*), which often had an occupational basis. Members of these associations were generally expected to attend the funerals of other members and to walk in procession on the feast of their patron, often carrying a lighted candle. For painters, this patron was St Luke, because he was said to have painted the portrait of the Virgin Mary, a tradition which goes back to the sixth century or even earlier.<sup>12</sup>

The artistic autonomy of the *bottega* was also limited by the desires of the customers. Contracts between painters and sculptors and these customers were often drawn up by a public notary, and these contracts frequently specify not only the subject, the materials, the delivery date and the price, but also the number, size and colouring of the figures. For example, in a contract for an altarpiece drawn up in 1503, it was agreed that the painter, Cosimo Rosselli, should paint

Christ 'crucified, with angels at each side with chalices to catch his glorious blood, well ornamented as is customary: at the foot of the said cross the figure and image of St Mary Magdalen on her knees, her hair in disorder, embracing the cross with devotion', and so on.<sup>13</sup> The emphasis on custom (*come s'usa*) is typical. Within this system, an artist had little need of book-learning because his subjects were selected by the client from a traditional, mainly religious repertoire of themes which more or less coincided with the pattern-books in the *bottega*. Hence the painter was considered a hand rather than a brain, and might be paid by the square foot, as was the case when Duke Borso d'Este paid Francesco Cossa for his frescoes in Palazzo Schifanoia in Ferrara c.1470.<sup>14</sup>

This system of organizing the arts, dominant in the Middle Ages, long outlasted them. In seventeenth-century Genoa, an attempt was made (unsuccessfully, it is true) to enforce the old guild statutes against a noble painter who had not served his time as a *garzone*.<sup>15</sup> In Venice, which was particularly conservative in this respect, the traditional system of *bottega* and *fraglia* still flourished in the middle of the eighteenth century. The family business of the Guardis was organized on similar lines to that of the Bellinis some three hundred years before. The father, Domenico, worked with his three sons, Antonio, Francesco and Nicolò, while his daughter Cecilia married into another family of painters, the Tiepolos. It has been pointed out that the elder brother Antonio succeeded his father in 'absolute control' of the family *bottega*, so that Francesco could only 'express his own personality' after Antonio's death.<sup>16</sup> If one looks at the contracts between painters and their clients in chronological order, it is to find 'no important difference between a contract drawn up in medieval times and one of 1750'.<sup>17</sup>

Even in the nineteenth century, this traditional system of organization was not completely defunct. Massimo d'Azeglio, for example, studied painting in Rome about the year 1820 in the studio of a certain Martin Verstappen, 'agreeing to be a pupil in the traditional manner of Giotto, Masaccio and their like'. (D'Azeglio's family, incidentally, objected to Massimo's choice of career for the same reason that Michelangelo's family had given: a nobleman should not sell pictures.)<sup>18</sup> More recently still, Carlo Carrà (born in 1881) was apprenticed at the age of twelve to a painter-decorator, and Giacomo Manzù (born in 1908) was apprenticed to an engraver. It is easy to underestimate continuity in social history.

Of course, these examples show traditional customs surviving in a changing world. The guilds had gradually lost their power. In

Florence, for example, Cosimo de' Medici emancipated artists from their guild in 1571. Even in Venice, where guilds remained stronger than elsewhere, there were changes. In 1682, the *depentori* were allowed to form their own *scuola*, separate from the *doradori*, the *cartoleri* and other craftsmen with whom they had been associated.<sup>19</sup>

The years 1571 and 1682 mark minor victories in a long campaign: the campaign by painters and sculptors to be considered as a special kind of people, unlike ordinary craftsmen. Around 1100 an inscription was placed on the façade of Modena cathedral: '*Inter sculptores quanto sis dignus onore / Claret sculptura nunc wiligelme tua*' (Among sculptors how greatly you are worthy of honour. Now, Wiligelmo, your sculpture shines forth).<sup>20</sup> A hundred and sixty years later the pulpit in the baptistery at Pisa was inscribed with similar sentiments: '*Anno milleno bis centum bisque triceno / Hoc opus insigne sculpsit Nicola Pisanus / Laudetur digne tam bene docta manus*' (In 1260 Nicola Pisano carved this noble work. May so greatly gifted a hand be praised as it deserves). In the early fourteenth century Nicola's son Giovanni Pisano described himself in an inscription as '*dotatus artis sculpturae prae cunctis ordine purae*' (endowed with the pure art of sculpture above all others).<sup>21</sup> In the fifteenth century, painters, according to Sant' Antonino, archbishop of Florence, were demanding payment not according to the square foot or the hour, but according to their skill. They were refusing to be considered as mere 'hands'.<sup>22</sup> Vasari's *Vite*, which it is scarcely anachronistic to call an exercise in public relations on behalf of artists, abounds with stories to show that they are something better than mere craftsmen. Fra Filippo Lippi, he claims, was captured by the Moors and made a slave, but he was released when it was discovered that he could draw. Donatello smashed a bust made for a Genoese merchant who haggled over the price and tried to calculate it in terms of the number of days the sculptor had worked on it. The 'divine' Michelangelo was, according to Vasari, sent by God – as a kind of secular Messiah – to rescue the arts from decline. Stories like these should be interpreted as myths which had the social function of justifying or legitimating the numerous attempts made by painters and sculptors of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to escape from their traditional status as craftsmen.

But if artists were not craftsmen, what were they?

### The artist as courtier

One obvious alternative to the role of craftsman was that of courtier. An early example is that of Giotto, who was the *familiaris* of the



king of Naples, in other words a member of his household. In the fifteenth century the painter becomes something of a familiar figure at court; one thinks of Leonardo at Milan (though he was many things besides a painter), of Mantegna at Mantua, of Cosimo Tura at Ferrara. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as republics declined in Italy, courts grew more numerous and more and more artists became courtiers, especially in Rome and in Florence. Bramante, Raphael, Michelangelo, Bernini, Maderno, and Algardi were only a few of the many artists at the court of Rome, while Vasari, Bronzino, Allori, Buontalenti, Giambologna, Tacca and Foggini were among the painters and sculptors active at the court of the Grand Dukes of Tuscany. Courts remained important centres of patronage until the days of Pius VII, or even later. Victor Emmanuel II was interested in historical paintings, and handed out commissions to artists such as Federico Andreotti, Giuseppe Bellucci and Annibale Gatti. There is a sense in which it is useful to speak of the 'court' of Mussolini, and the official, flattering portraits of the Duce and his 'new order', like Manlio Giarrizzo's *Il Duce a Littoria* (1934), which received the Premio del Partito Nazionale Fascista, are reminiscent of nothing so much as the court portraits of Cosimo de' Medici.

To enjoy the protection and the favour of a prince (or indeed of a great noble) had many advantages for an artist in the sixteenth or seventeenth century. It meant the opportunity to work on ambitious large-scale projects and to escape from the claims of the guilds. In 1540, for example, Paul III issued a *motuproprio* declaring that Michelangelo, Pierantonio Cecchini and other sculptors at the court of Rome were free from any claims by the local guild, the *ars scalpellinorum* as the document calls it, because sculptors were '*virī studiosi et scientifici*' (learned and knowledgeable men), who were not to be counted '*inter artifices mecanicos*'.<sup>23</sup> To turn courtier also meant economic security. When Mantegna became court painter at Mantua, he was given a monthly salary and free lodgings, corn and wood. Salvator Rosa gained 9,000 scudi in nine years at the court of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and Bernini did very well at the court of Rome. Not the least advantage of working at court was the relatively high status it conferred. The artist was no longer a mere shopkeeper. Michelangelo, who was extremely conscious of his noble origin, once reminded his nephew that 'I was never the kind of painter or sculptor who kept a shop. I was always taught to avoid this for the sake of the honour of my father and my brothers.'<sup>24</sup> The court artist could dress splendidly and live in a fine house, like Raphael's or Federico Zuccaro's house in Rome, or Giulio Romano's