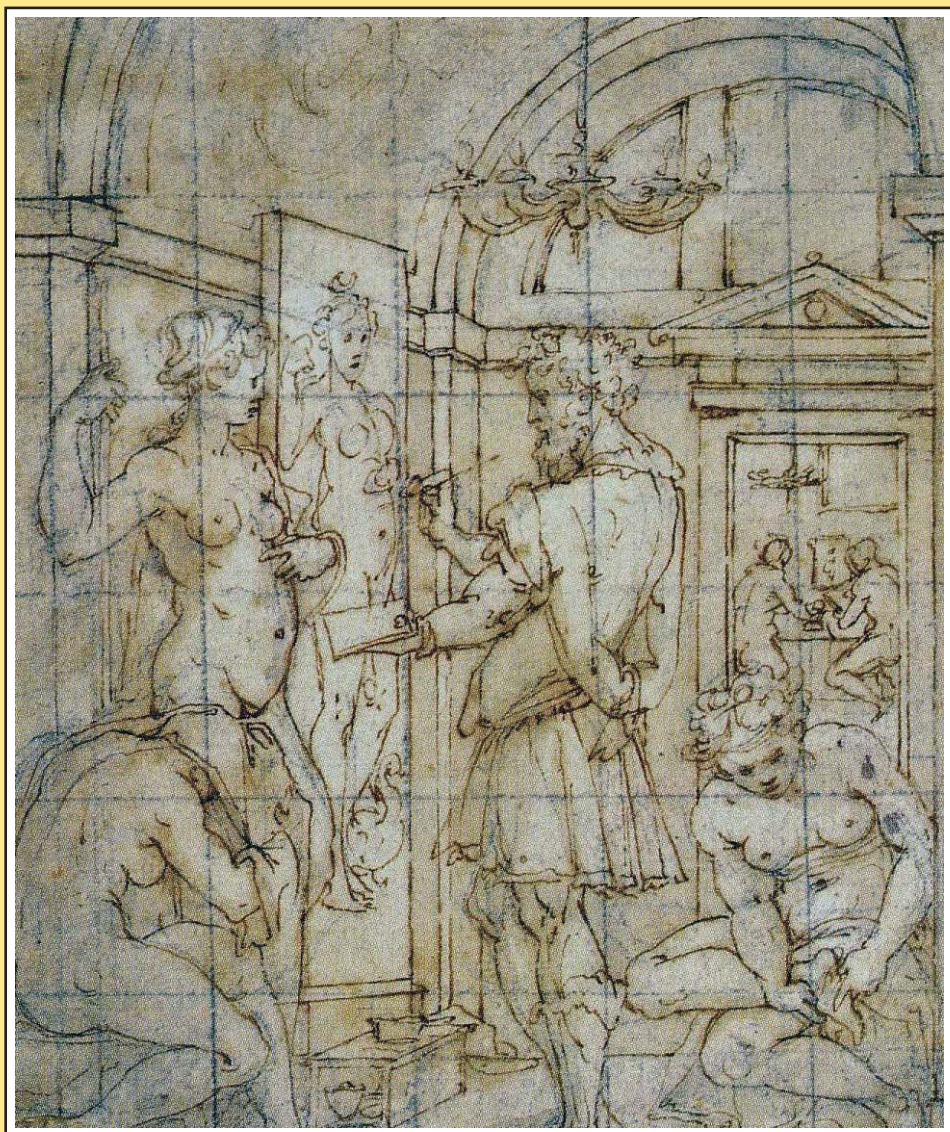


Giorgio Vasari's *Prefaces*

ART & THEORY



LIANA DE GIROLAMI CHENEY

with a Foreword by Wolfram Prinz

Giorgio Vasari's Prefaces: Art and Theory provides students and scholars alike with the opportunity to study and understand the art, theory, and visual culture of Giorgio Vasari and sixteenth century Italy. For the first time all of Vasari's *Prefaces* from the *Lives of the Artists* (1568) are included translated into English as well as in the original Italian. Also included is an English translation of Giovanni Battista Adriani's letter to Giorgio Vasari enlightening Vasari on the art of the ancient masters.

Through the eyes of Vasari, this book captures the creative achievements of his fellow artists—how they adopt nature and the classical tradition as their muses and how they ingeniously interpret the secular and religious themes of the past and present. Vasari himself is lauded for the transformation of the artist from one of being a mere laborer to one who imbues his work with intellectual depth and is recognized as a creator of beautiful visual myths.



Liana De Girolami Cheney, Professor of Art History and Chairperson of the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, is author and coauthor of numerous books and articles, including, *Botticelli's Neoplatonic Images* (1983); *The Religious Architecture of Lowell* (1984); *The Paintings of the Casa Vasari* (1985); *Whistler and His Birthplace, Lowell* (1988); *Andrea del Verrocchio's Celebration: 1435–1488* (1990); *The Symbolism of Vanitas in the Arts* (1993); *Medievalism and Pre-Raphaelitism* (1993); *Piero della Francesca's Treatise on Painting* (facsimile, 1994); *Readings in Italian Mannerism* (Lang, 1997); *Self-Portraits of Women Painters* (2000 and 2009); *Neoplatonism and the Arts* (2000); *Essays on Women Artists: 'The Most Excellent'* (2003); *Neoplatonic Aesthetics in Literature, Music and the Visual Art* (Lang, 2004); *Giorgio Vasari's Teachers: Sacred and Profane Art* (Lang, 2007); *Giuseppe Arcimboldo* (2008); *The Homes of Giorgio Vasari* (Lang, 2006); *Le dimore di Giorgio Vasari* (Lang, 2011); and *Giorgio Vasari's Life and Lives, A Homage of Einar Rud* (2011).

Giorgio Vasari's *Prefaces*



PETER LANG

New York • Washington, D.C./Baltimore • Bern
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Most of all my gratitude is directed toward Giorgio Vasari (1511–1574), in particular during his 500th anniversary celebration of his birth, who is my mentor and a constant source of inspiration and wonderment for my understanding of art, culture and theory. *Ad maiorem Vasari gloriam!*

Liana De Girolami Cheney
Boston 2011

Foreword

Liana De Girolami Cheney's *Giorgio Vasari's Prefaces: Art and Theory* provides an extensive survey of the content and meaning of Giorgio Vasari's *Prefaces* from the *Lives of the Most Excellent Architects, Painters and Sculptors* (*Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori*, 1550 and 1568 editions, Figs. 1–5), a fundamental Cinquecento work that embraces the time from antiquity up to the time of Vasari. Cheney's book successfully documents how, in the *Prefaces*, Vasari presents his artistic theory as well as capturing the essence of the artistic practices of his fellow artists.

Giorgio Vasari's Prefaces: Art and Theory reveals the importance of the work of Vasari, who is the first to understand and expand the view of Italian Renaissance art and theory. It considers Vasari's intellectual ability, observing his erudition, his knowledge of ancient literature and philosophy, and his relationship with the humanists of his time.

Giorgio Vasari's Prefaces: Art and Theory encapsulates the importance for Vasari to formulate the role of the artist as a creator of beautiful forms and an intellectual being. In addition, it demonstrates the significance of the *Prefaces* for Vasari because in them he articulates several concepts about art and art theory that will influence the study of art history in years to come. *Giorgio Vasari's Prefaces: Art and Theory* articulates Vasari's artistic quests are best expressed in his *Prefaces*, including notions about periodicity, history and rebirth of art (*rinascita*); his explanation of how Florentine artists learn to master their artistic skills by observing nature and by imitating classical forms (*all'antica*); his composing of artistic criteria for judging works of art; and his explanation of the necessity of good design (*disegno*) to create a beautiful form (*bella maniera*) or beauty that pleases the eyes and delights the soul of the beholder.

Giorgio Vasari's Prefaces: Art and Theory also provides the reader with a global vision of Vasari's artistic theory, including an explanation of his definition of “disegno” (“drawing” or “design”). In general terms, Vasari's periodization of art, which for the first time is postulated in his *Prefaces*, is also explained.

Vasari's ingenious ability to establish an institution for artists based on the fundamental principle of the art, *disegno*, identifies him as an innovator as well as an impresario. Along with Cosimo I de' Medici, the Grand Duke of Tuscany (1519–1574) and Vincenzo Borghini, (1515–1580), friend and intellectual advisor, Vasari successfully establishes the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno in 1563. This prestigious academy of art is the first since antiquity. Marking this historical foundation, Michelangelo (1475–1564) designs an emblem with three intertwined crowns, symbolizing the three fine arts: architecture, sculpture and painting, having a common base, the art of *disegno*. Earlier, Vasari, in his first edition of the *Vite* (1550, Fig. 6), depicts a cartouche in an endpiece where Fame, with blowing trumpet and flaming torch, announces the triumph of the Fine Arts. With their respective attributes of architecture, sculpture and painting, the Fine Arts awake and inspire creative imagination of artists. In the second edition of the *Vite* (1568, Fig. 7), he elaborates on the cartouche, providing Fame with a triple trumpet and adding the Virgilian motto, “Hac sospite nunquam hos periisse viros, victos avt morte fatebor” (“While history lives, it would never be said that artists' work has perished”). Both Vasari and Michelangelo exalt the artists' invention and imitation through the art of *disegno*.

Inspired by Vasari's initiative, the Roman painter, Federico Zuccari (1532/3–1609), who is already involved in the foundation of the Florentine academy, establishes a Roman academy for the arts, the Accademia di San Luca, in 1593. Both academies, Florentine and Roman, have a unified goal of instructing young artists in the Fine Arts and, in particular, educating them about the connection between the arts and their respective artistic theories.

It is difficult to imagine where the history of Italian Renaissance art would be without the writings of Giorgio Vasari. The *Vite* is the first book on the history of art that designs within an historical frame an interwoven chain of cultural patterns, anecdotal stories, and visual imagery, which are embodied in the biographies of the artist; and also articulates the intent and aesthetic quests of art, which is contained in the prefaces. Vasari conceives the *Prefaces* as an introductory précis on the signification of creativity and on the manifestations of art is revealed in this book.

Giorgio Vasari's Prefaces: Art and Theory will interest not only those who are initiating their study of Italian art, but in general, all those who are interested in Italian culture. In addition, it will be of value to scholars of art history.

Wolfram Prinz, Professor of Art History, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, Frankfurt am Main, and former President of the *Classe Storia dell'Arte* of the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno, Florence 2011

Introduction

It is undeniably true that if the artists of our own time were justly rewarded,
they would produce even greater works of art,
far superior to those of the ancient world.¹

—Giorgio Vasari, *Vite*

Giorgio Vasari (1511–74, Figs. 8–10), Tuscan painter, architect, art collector and writer, is best known for his *Le Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori e scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri*² (Lives of the Most Excellent Architects, Painters and Sculptors of Italy, from Cimabue to the Present Time), which was first published in 1550, followed in 1568 by an enlarged edition illustrated with woodcuts of artists' portraits.³ By virtue of this text, Vasari is known as “the first art historian”⁴ since the time of Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historiae* (Natural History), c. 79.

Vasari's classical upbringing, cultural experiences and intellectual pursuits provide him with an extended repertoire of visual imagery and conceits. This type of visual culture manifests not only in the depiction of his secular and religious programs, but also in the formation of a new pictorial language, a vocabulary of images. This pictorial dictionary with ascribed emblematic conceits anticipates Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* (1593). Thus, Vasari emerges as the founder of the discipline of art history, and his work serves as a precursor of the emblematic tradition.⁵

As a young man, Vasari starts collecting the drawings of early painters in order to assemble examples of their work that he can learn from through imitation. In the *Vite*, he frequently refers to “Our Book,” alluding to his book of drawings (Fig. 11).⁶ Fortunately, many of these beautifully mounted drawings by Vasari still exist, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, Gabinetto dei Disegni e delle Stampe degli Uffizi in Florence, the Stockholm Museum of Art in Sweden, the British Museum in London and the Louvre Museum in Paris. Vasari's love of drawing and his vigorous efforts to collect drawings will continue on throughout his entire artistic career. His enthusiasm and admiration for the art of drawing are

revealed in the *Vite* in his description and analysis of the artists who create these works.

In 1546, Vasari, already a painter and architect of considerable fame, is painting the frescoes of the Cancelleria Palace in Rome for Cardinal Alexander Farnese. It is at this time that Paolo Giovio, who collaborated on the program for these frescoes, approaches him with the idea of writing a history of art. Reluctant at first, but strongly encouraged by Giovio, he turns to his “notes and memoranda,” which, as Vasari says, “I had prepared even from my boyhood, for my own recreation, and because of a certain affection which I preserved for the memory of our artists, every notice respecting whom had been most interesting to me.”⁷ His interactions with the prominent humanists of the time—Giovanni Battista Adriani (1511–1579), Vincenzo Borghini (1515–1580), Annibale Caro (1507–1566), Cardinal Alexander Farnese (1468–1549), Francesco Maria Molza (1489–1544) and, particularly, Paolo Giovio (1483–1552) himself—motivate him to travel throughout Italy, not only to collect drawings, but also to make further notes on the paintings, sculptures and buildings that he sees and studies.⁸ For over a decade, Vasari’s thoughts are occupied with literary and theoretical writings, including biographical and anecdotal stories about these illustrious artists and draftsmen. This enterprise culminates in his writing the *Vite*. In creating the text, Vasari seeks help from many contemporary humanists, such as the historian Adriani, whose knowledge and records of ancient art history aided Vasari’s own writing on the subject, as well as the philologist and grammarian Borghini.⁹ To assure accuracy in his writing style, he also seeks help from the current master of good literary style, Annibale Caro.¹⁰

A stranger to modesty, Vasari considers himself to be one of the most significant painters and architects of his time—an exponent of the Maniera style and a follower of the Renaissance tradition. His religious art embellishes the main churches of Bologna, Florence, Naples, Rome and Venice. His secular art—decorative cycles with complex iconographical programs and delights—can be found in the Vatican, in the Sala Regia, a large hall just outside the Sistine Chapel; in the Sala dei Cento Giorni in the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome; and in the *saloni* or halls of the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. Vasari’s fascination with courtly ornamentation extends to his devising lavish festivities to accompany the triumphal entries and weddings of his patrons, and he becomes a specialist in the invention of these spectacles. In 1574, the last year of his life, Vasari remains an active artist, painting the interior of the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore, the Florentine cathedral.

Vasari’s artistic success also manifests itself in architecture, where he demonstrates both distinction and versatility,¹¹ in the Palazzo dei Cavalieri in

Pisa and the Church of the Madonna dell' Umiltà in Pistoia. With great ingenuity, he also remodels the interior of the Palazzo Vecchio and designs the monumental colonnade of the Uffizi. For a short time, Vasari even serves as a consultant at St. Peter's.¹²

A few attempts to write about art and the lives of the artists had been made by artists before the Cinquecento,¹³ but nothing compares to the scope and magnitude of Vasari's *Vite*.¹⁴ In *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance*, Eric Cochrane observes that it is during the Renaissance that the transformation of writing biographies into writing history is successfully accomplished by writers on the arts.¹⁵ Inspired by the ancients, including Marcus Vitruvius Polio (80/70–15 BCE), Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus 13–79), Lucian of Samosata (125–180) and Philostratus (Lucius Flavius Philostratus, 170–247),¹⁶ and early Renaissance biographers, including Filippo Villani (active 1316–1321), Vespasiano da Bisticci (1421–1498) and Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444), writers in the sixteenth century begin to examine ancient and modern art and artists. In the *Paragone*, for example, the humanist, historian and poet Benedetto Varchi (1502/3–1565) comments on the influence of Pliny the Elder—who had written of the artists of antiquity in terms of a progressive historical development—on Vasari's idea to write artists' biographies in a historical periodization in the *Vite*.¹⁷ Early Renaissance biographers, such as Filippo Villani, write on *virī illustres*, or biographies of men of arms and letters; Vespasiano da Bisticci compiles a history of fifteenth-century humanism, *Vite di uomini illustri del secolo XV*;¹⁸ while Leonardo Bruni composes a manuscript on the history of the Florentine people.¹⁹ Giambattista Gelli's *Lives* (1549) traces the origin of Florentine art in the sixteenth century to the aesthetic innovations of Giotto in the early fourteenth century.²⁰ Pietro Summonte traces the introduction of the artistic tradition in Naples in the mid-fifteenth century to the cultural policies of Alfonso d'Aragona. And Marcantonio Michiel makes extensive notes on the location and the attributions of works of art in northern Italy (Padua, Cremona, Milan, Bergamo and Venice).²¹

In the Renaissance, some artists, in the spirit of experimentation, write enthusiastically about art and the lives of the artists who came before them, such as Cennino Cennini in the *Libro dell'Arte* (1390), Lorenzo Ghiberti in his *Commentaries* (1450), Leon Battista Alberti in his many books on the theories of painting, sculpture and architecture (1436–76), and Leonardo da Vinci (1500) and Raphael Sanzio (1520), in the manuscript notes they both left for lives of artists and for treatises on art.²² But nothing of the scope and magnitude of Vasari's work had been conceived before. It is not surprising, there-

fore, that Vasari is considered to be the founder of the discipline of art history.²³

Thus, in his *Vite (Lives)*, Vasari reveals his conception of art history through the formulation of an organic scheme of historical progression. This historical view is interpreted in the *Vite* in the prefaces and in the biographies of artists. The prefaces (*proemi*) present an almost cyclical view of history, determined by the laws of nature instead of by specific historical events, whereas the biographies explain the historical process in the evolution of each artist's accomplishments, presenting "the true mirror of human life."²⁴

Vasari's purpose in writing the *Vite* is to provide historical perspective and artistic guidance to his fellow artists. These two significant issues are evident in his explanation of the concept of rebirth, in which he combines the concept of progress with that of moral intention. Vasari's idea of progress is described by means of the inevitable pattern of change from imperfection to perfection in the arts—the creation of an artistic canon. And his concept of moral intention is related to the Cinquecento notion of the spirit of history, which fulfills its real purpose by helping individuals to be prudent and by showing them how to live.

For historians, the notion of a rebirth means the re-creation of classical art. But Vasari knows that such a rebirth has not occurred simply because artists suddenly begin to copy the best classical art. He posits that for some mysterious reason, artists begin to try to present objects and figures naturally at the same time they are observing and imitating antique sculpture. He also wonders why Renaissance artists evince the same artistic interest in nature as the ancient artists. The observation of antiquity, then, guides artists to study nature. For Vasari, artists strive to emulate nature, not classical antiquity. So when he notes that Giotto is taught by Nature, he is, in actuality, pointing to the surprising fact that the rebirth appears to occur because artists turned initially to the real world of Nature and not to classical art.

Vasari's critical description and historical interpretation of rebirth emerges from an extended comparison between artistic change and the life and death of a person in a gradual progression. He describes artists in the First Period in terms of childhood. He praises artists because they are beginning to learn the rules, but thinks them imperfect. Vasari describes artists of the Second Period in adolescent terms. Like a precocious youngster, these artists depend on strict rules of art but lack the overall confidence and independence of an adult. Vasari describes Third Period artists as fully mature adults. These artists deal easily with technical difficulties and exercise independent judgment, demonstrating an ability to express the most complex emotional states. In other words, here art has fulfilled its potentiality. Vasari says in his *Vite* that rebirth

“is inherent in the very nature of the arts to progress step by step from modest beginnings, and finally reach the summit of perfection.”²⁵ Thus, the *Vite* provides the first book of art history. The introduction discusses the techniques of art, the prefaces explain the theories of art from antiquity to the present, and the biographies illustrate the historical development of individual artists’ accomplishments.

In Vasari’s book on the lives of the artists, the main theme focuses on the revival of true art in Tuscany by Giotto and Cimabue. Here, he records the steady progress at the hands of such artists as Ghiberti, Brunelleschi and Donatello, and examines its culmination with Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael, living artists in whom this progress finally reaches its apex. Vasari considers them godly (*divini*) because they were able to surpass nature and ancient art in their art.²⁶ Vasari sees no reason to doubt that a long line of worthy successors will follow the masters, whose works he records. Although his accuracy is often contested on particular points, the *Vite* remains to this day one of the most important sources for the period it covers and serves as an invaluable document on aesthetics, art history and art theory of the sixteenth century.²⁷ To the sixteenth-century reader of Vasari, art is an important source of personal gratification and an absorbing intellectual interest—a significant part of the Italian ideal of life.²⁸

In the *Vite*, Vasari composes four prefaces (*proemi*). The Preface to the Whole is a prolegomenon to the *Vite*. The other three prefaces are explanatory essays on the nature of art. Each precedes a section of biographies.

The separating of the prefaces from the biographies is done to focus on the significance of Cinquecento art theory and its impact in subsequent formulations of art theory. In the present study, the aim is to present Vasari’s prefaces as a unique, cohesive whole, wherein he explains his ideas on how to view, judge and understand Florentine art and its superiority over previous, non-Tuscan artistry.

Vasari creates a new artistic vocabulary based on his experiences as an artist, analyzing, interpreting, recording and collecting art, especially drawings. As we have seen, his artistic vocabulary, even though innovative, is actually drawn from previous artistic and theoretical conceptions presented in the works of ancient writers, especially Pliny the Elder’s *Natural History* and Vitruvius’s *On Architecture* (Ten Books on Architecture), as well as the works of earlier Florentine artists and humanists, such as Lorenzo Ghiberti’s *Commentaries* and Leon Battista Alberti’s theoretical writings on the fine arts. From his contemporary fellow artists and humanists, Vasari learns to interpret history and cultural developments; he is influenced by Michelangelo’s artistic and poetical ability, as well as by Paolo Giovio’s writings on illustrious men,²⁹

Benedetto Varchi's discourses on painting and sculpture, literary criticism on the philosophy of beauty and grace,³⁰ and Annibale Caro's poetical compositions of songs and comedies, as well as translations of ancient texts, including Virgil's *Aeneid* (c.1547) and Aristotle's *Poetics* (1549).³¹

The aim of the present study is to provide direct access to the entire preface of the 1568 edition of the *Vite* and its dedication to Vasari's most devoted patron, Cosimo I de' Medici, Duke of Florence and Siena, as well as his fellow artists. This edition provides for the first time an English translation of a letter to Vasari from the humanist Giovanni Battista Adriani, which was originally part of the 1568 edition.

This book consists of the original Italian versions, with English translation, of Vasari's four prefaces to the *Vite* from the 1568 edition, two dedicatory letters to Duke Cosimo I de' Medici (1550 and 1568), two letters to his fellow artists, a letter from Giovanni Battista Adriani to Vasari explaining the ancient history of art, and Vasari's *vita* (autobiography). With the exception of Adriani's letter (translated in English for the first time), the edited English translations of these materials are based on the works of Mrs. Jonathan Foster (1902–1907) and Gaston Du C. de Vere (1912), with some emendations from the present author. Also included are reproductions of the title pages, frontispieces and endpieces from the *Vite* of 1550 and 1568 editions, an explanatory introduction on the significance of Vasari's prefaces, a summary of the content of the prefaces, and a selective bibliography. The book as a whole is intended to provide enlightenment and spark the curiosity of young artists and students of art history and history; humanists; and other readers interested in the visual culture and artistic identity of Florentine artists of the sixteenth century.³² For the illustrations used in this text, the author selected mostly works by Vasari in order to underscore the connection between what he says in his writing in the *Prefaces* and his artistic visualizations in his drawings and paintings.

Through the eyes of Vasari, this book seeks to capture the creative achievements of his fellow artists: how they adopt nature and the classical tradition as their muses, and how ingeniously they interpret the secular and religious themes of the past and present. Vasari himself is applauded for the transformation of the artist as an intellectual maker and is recognized as a creator of beautiful visual myths.

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Notes

1. Vasari continues: "Instead, the artist today struggles to ward off famine rather than to win fame, and this crushes and buries his talent and obscures his name. This is a shame and disgrace to those who could come to his help but refuse to do so." See Bettarini-Barocchi, IV, p. 12, see also, pp. 10–15. This is an invaluable comparative study of Rossana Bettarini and Paola Barocchi found in the 1550 and 1568 editions of Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori* (Florence: Sansoni, 1971–1986), hereafter referred to as Bettarini-Barocchi. See also, Pio Pecchiai, ed. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori* (Milan: Sonzogno, 1928), Introduction, pp. vii–xxvi, for one of the earliest scholarly discussions of the sources and influences on Vasari's *Vite*. This edition is beautifully illustrated, assisting readers on the visualization of the historical monuments discussed in the *Vite*. For a helpful annotated 1550 edition of the *Vite*, see Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori*, eds., Luciano Bellosi and Aldo Rossi with a foreword by Giovanni Previtali, (Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1986).

NB: Vasari's editorial text translations are consulted with the recent English edition of *Giorgio Vasari's Lives of the Most eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, translated by Gaston Du C. de Vere in 1912 from Vasari's *Vite* of 1568 edition, with an Introduction by Kenneth Clark (Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, New York, 1979); Mrs. Jonathan Foster, *Lives of Seventy of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects by Giorgio Vasari*, trans. from the Italian (London: H. G. Bohn, 1855–850); an expanded version of the latter, Mrs. Jonathan Foster, *Lives of Seventy of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects by Giorgio Vasari*, edited and annotated by E. H. and E. W. Blashfield and A. A. Hopkins (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902); and reprinted, Mrs. Jonathan Foster, *Lives of Seventy of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1902–1907). For other translations, see Giorgio Vasari, *The lives of the painters, sculptors and architects* (London: J. M. Dent; New York, Dutton, 1949–50); *Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the most eminent painters, sculptors, and architects*. Abridged from the translation by Gaston Du C. De Vere, edited with an introduction by Robert N. Linscott (New York: Modern Library, 1959); *Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the artists*. Selected and translated by E.L. Seeley. Introd. by Alfred Werner (New York: Noonday Press, 1965, c1957); *Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the artists*; a selection translated by George Bull (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1987); and *Giorgio Vasari, The lives of the artists*; translated with an introduction and notes by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

2. In the second (1568) edition (also dedicated to Cosimo), which is to become the standard text of the work, the title is changed to *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*. Consequently, the book is often referred to as *Vasari's Lives of the Painters*, although Vasari always speaks of architecture as the master art, and a consideration of architecture stands first in his *Preface*.
3. Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori et architetti*, ed. by Gaetano Milanesi (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1973). This edition is noted throughout this essay and text as Vasari-Milanesi. In this book, however, I consulted, beside the original Vasari's *Vite* of the Cinquecento editions, the English translations of *Giorgio Vasari's The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, by George Bull (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965 and revised edition 1971), and *Giorgio Vasari's Le Vite de' più eccel-*

lenti pittori, scultori, et architettori by Gaston Du C. de Vere (Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, New York, 1979), p. 503, herewith cited as Vasari-de Vere. The English translations are both based on Vasari's 1568 edition of the *Vite*. De Vere's translation first appears in 1912. This edition is subsequently reissued by Harry Abrams Publishers, New York, in 1979, with an Introduction by Lord Kenneth Clark, and recently by Modern Library Publishers, New York, in 2006, with an Introduction by Philip Jacks. See also, Wolfram Prinz, *La seconda edizione del Vasari e la comparsa di "vite" artistiche con ritratti," Il Vasari*, XXIV (1963), pp. 1–14, and Wolfram Prinz, "Vasaris Sammlung von Künstlerbildnissen," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, Beiheft zu Band XII, (1966), pp 8–40, for a critical study of the 144 woodcuts of the artist's portraits. (An Italian translation without illustrations is in the library of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence).

4. Einar Rud, *Vasari's Life and Lives: The First Art Historian* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961–1963), Introduction. In 1960, Rud, a biographer and scholar of Vasari, characterizes him as the first art historian. See Liana De Girolami Cheney, ed., *Einar Rud, Vasari's Life and Lives: The First Art Historian* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2011).
5. Vasari is particularly familiar with such emblematic books as Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499), Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica* (1505), Pierio Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica* (1521), Vincenzo Cartari's *Imagines delli Dei de gl'Antichi* (1550), and Andrea Alciato's *Emblemata* (1531, 1536, 1542). Correspondingly, with the knowledge of Alciato's *Emblemata* familiarity with Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica*, Vasari assimilates their concepts and learns about the *Greek Anthology*. Franciscus de Alopa first publishes it in Florence in 1494. In 1522, Alciato translates it into Latin.
6. L. Collobi-Ragghianti, *Vasari Libro dei Disegni* (Milan: Architettura, 1973), L. Collobi-Ragghianti *Il Libro de' Disegni del Vasari* (Florence: Vallecchi Edition, 1974), and Per Bjurström, *Italian Drawings from the Collection of Giorgio Vasari* (Stockholm: Nationalmuseum, 2001).
7. Vasari-Milanese, Preface I. Paolo Giovio continues to encourage Vasari to work on this project: "Write brother mine, write...you will be more joyful, more famous and more rich by this fine work, than if you had painted the chapel of Michelangelo, which is perishing with saltpeter and cracks." See Paolo Giovio's letters to Vasari in 2 April 1547 and 7 May 1548 in Karl Frey, *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris* (Munich: Georg Müller, 1923), pp. 196 and 198, and, T.S.R. Boase, *Giorgio Vasari: The Man and the Book* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 45.
8. Vasari's collection of drawings is chosen to illustrate the styles of the artists whose lives he is writing about. In part, he inherits a collection of drawings from a descendant of Lorenzo Ghiberti in 1528. The "Libro de' Disegni" is often mentioned in the *Vite*. See Licia Ragghianti Collobi, *Il Libro de' Disegni del Vasari* (Bologna: Vallecchi, 1974), Introduction.
9. The first English translation of Adriani's letter is published here in this book. See Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in The Italian Renaissance*, p. 403, and G. Bertoli e R. Drusi, ed., *Fra lo «Spedale» e il Principe. Vincenzio Borghini, filologia e invenzione nella Firenze di Cosimo I*. Atti del Convegno (Florence 21–22, March, 2002), (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2005), Introduction. The collaboration between Vasari and Borghini is clearly noted in the extensive correspondence between them. See Karl Frey's *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris* (Munich: Georg Müller, 1923), pp. 233–755. In

- 1541, in 1541, Vincenzo Borghini (1515–1580), an ordained priest, is assigned to the Badia of Arezzo. It is perhaps, at that time, he meets Vasari in Arezzo. Sometime before 1552, Vasari introduces Borghini to the Medicean court. In 1552 and in 1553, respectively, Duke Cosimo I appoints Borghini as supervisor (*spedalingo*) of the Hospital of the Innocents and advisor to the Accademia del Disegno. In Florence and in Rome, Borghini and Vasari continue their collaboration in programming the rooms' decorations of Palazzo Vecchio (Sala del Cinquecento, Sala degli Elementi, Studiolo di Francesco I, and Il Tesoretto), and the Paolina Chapel. In 1555, Borghini with the humanist Cosimo Bartoli assists Vasari in writing *I Ragionamenti*.
10. Bernard Degenhart and Amegrot Schmitt, "Methoden Vasaris bei der Gestaltung seines 'Libro'," in Wolfgang Lotz and Lise Lotte Moller, eds., *Studien zur Toskanischen Kunst: Festschrift Ludwig Heinrich Heydenreich* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1964). After Annibale Caro reads a draft of the *Vite*, he makes several stylistic recommendations to improve the "elegance" of the writing. Specifically, Caro comments on Vasari's grammar: "Move the verbs from the end to the middle of your sentences, make sure you use the correct nouns." See Karl Frey, *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris* (Munich: Georg Müller, 1923), p. 210. When Vasari completes the *Vite* in July, 1547, he takes the manuscript to have a copy made by Don Giammatteo Faetani, an Olivetan prior, in Rimini. For a literary relationship between Vasari and Faetani and the possible influence on the style of the *Vite*, see Ugo Scoti-Bertinelli, "Giorgio Vasari Scrittore," *Annali Reale Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* (1905), pp. 207–9.
 11. Clark's *Introduction* in Vasari-de Vere, p. xv.
 12. Clark's *Introduction* in Vasari-de Vere, p. xv.
 13. Giuliano Tanturli, "Le biografie d' artista prima del Vasari," in *Vasari storiografo e artista: Atti Del. Congresso Internazionale nel IV centenario della sua morte* (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1976), pp. 275–98. Examples of artists writing early artist biographies are Cennini in the *Libro dell'Arte* (1390), Ghiberti in his *Commentaries* (1450), Leon Battista Alberti in his many books on art theories of painting, sculpture and architecture (1436–76), and Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, both of whom write manuscript notes on the lives of artists as well as on treatises of art. Giambattista Gelli's *Lives* (1549) traced the origin of Florentine art in the sixteenth century to the aesthetic innovations of Giotto 200 years earlier. In addition, the Venetian, Marcantonio Michiel, composes a manuscript about Northern Renaissance artists.
 14. The title of the 1550 edition is *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani, da Cimabue insino a' tempi nostri nell'edizione per I tipi di Lorenzo Torrentino Firenze, 1550*. This earlier title is changed in the 1568 edition to *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*. See Bettarini-Barocchi I, xvii. For a discussion of the change of Vasari's title of the *Vite*, see also Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Giorgio Vasari's Studio, Diligenza ed Amorevale Fatica," in *Reading Vasari*, eds. A. Barriault, et al (London: Philip Wilson, 2004), pp. 259–75.
 15. Eric Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in The Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 400, and Julius Schlosser Magnino, *La Letteratura artistica* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1977, first published in 1924).
 16. Vitruvius (c.40 BCE) writes on Roman architecture, which survives from antiquity until the Renaissance; Pliny the Elder (*Natural History*, c.79) comments on ancient art and artists; Lucian (*Dream*, 120–200) narrates legends and cites works about artists such as Apelles; and Philostratus (*Images*, 120) composes a book with real and imaginary paintings.

17. Benedetto Varchi (1502–1565), *Lezione della quale si disputa della maggioranza dell'arti e qual sia piu nobile, la scultura o la pittura, Firenze 1547*, in Paola Barocchi, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, I (Bari: G. Laterza, 1960), p. 36, quoting Varchi, "M. Giorgio Vasari d'Arezzo, mio amicissimo, a imitazione di molti altri pittori antichi o più tosto di Plinio." See also L. Mendelsohn, *Paragone: Benedetto Varchi Due Lezioni and Cinquecento Art Theory* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), for an English translation of Varchi's *Due Lezioni*.
18. Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vite di uomini illustri del secolo xv (The Vespasiano Memoirs: Lives of Illustrious Men of the XV Century)*, ed. Myron Gilmore (New York: Harper Torch books, 1963 and 1997), and Wolfram Prinz, "I ragionamenti del Vasari sullo sviluppo e declino delle arti," in *Il Vasari: Storiografo e Artista* (Florence: Istituto di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1976), pp. 857–67.
19. Giuliano Tantaruli, "Le biografie d'artista prima del Vasari," in *Vasari storiografo e artista: Atti Del. Congresso Internazionale nel IV centenario della sua morte* (Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1976), pp. 275–98. See also Leonardo Bruni, *History of The Florentine People*, ed. and trans. by James Hankins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).
20. See Armando de Gaetano, *Giambastista Gelli and the Florentine Academy* (Florence: Olschki, 1976), pp. 46–50.
21. Paolo Mussi, *Marcantonio Michiel* (London: Macmillan 1903, English translation). Other Vasari's contemporary sources include Baldassare Castiglione's *Cortegiano* (1528), critical treatises of Marco Girolami Vida (1527), Gian Giorgio Trissino (1529), Bernardino Daniello (1536), Cinthio Giraldis (1541), Bernardo Segni (1549), and the critical writings of Pietro Bembo, Giovanni della Casa, Benedetto Varchi, and Pietro Aretino.
22. Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters*, ed. by Marilyn Aronberg Lavin (New York: The Heritage Press, 1967), p. xi. See Ernest Gombrich, "The Renaissance Conception of Artistic Progress," in *Norm and Form* (London: Phaidon Press, 1971), pp. 4–9.
23. Einar Rud, *Vasari's Life and Lives: The First Art Historian* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1961–1963), Introduction. It is also important to bear in mind that Vasari is educated and well read in the classics as well as in the writings of humanists from the time of Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) to Ludovico Ariosto (1474–1533). See Licia and Carlo L. Ragghianti, "Introduzione," for Giorgio Vasari's *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*, 4 vols. (Milan: Rizzoli, 1971–78), pp. 9–59.
24. Bettarini-Barocchi, Preface II, III, pp. 3–20.
25. Bettarini-Barocchi, Preface II, III, p. 5.
26. In Preface Three of the *Vite*, Vasari observes that "*maniera* is that artistic element for which a perfect form is created; the total configuration of a beautiful figure or perfect form is the result of comparing and copying parts from other beautiful or perfect figures." See Vasari-Milanesi, IV, pp. 7–15. Perhaps it is by no mere accident that Vasari's quest for life focuses on the achievement of beauty and excellence in art, since he is born and raised in Arezzo, a village founded by the Etruscans in seventh century BCE, and whose inhabitants strive for the highest endeavors, as their town's name implies. The name *Arezzo* derives from the Greek word *areté* (virtue), from the Latin term *arretium*, (altar) and/or from the Hebrew word *arez* (for fertile land).
27. Several other attempts to record the lives of artists are made, the most ambitious of which is Lorenzo Ghiberti's *Commentarii*. The other collections of note by anonymous authors

- are the *Anonimo Billi* (*Anonimo Gaddiano*, 1542) and the *Anonimo Magliabechiano* (1537/42), which are likely available to Vasari, and some of his stories even appear in the *Anonimo Billi*, although there is no proof of derivation. However, both in style and quantity, Vasari's *Vite* transcend the works of these early compilers. He is likely correct when he writes in a letter to Duke Cosimo I: "What I am sending you is the result not of two months work, but of ten years study." See Kenneth Clark's Introduction in *Giorgio Vasari's Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, trans. Gaston Du C. de Vere (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1979), p. xviii, herewith cited as Vasari-de Vere.
28. Foster's *Giorgio Vasari's Lives*, p. xxxi. Foster's original translation dates to 1851. In 2005, Dover Publications of New York reissued this translation with an introduction by Marilyn A. Lavin.
 29. Zimmermann, T. C. Price. *Paolo Giovio: The Historian and the Crisis of Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995) and Paolo Giovio: *Ragionamento sopra I motti e disegni d'arme e d'amore, che communemente chiamono imprese* (Venice 1555).
 30. Benedetto Varchi (1504–1565). See L. Mendelsohn, *Paragoni: Benedetto Varchi Due Lezioni and Cinquecento Art Theory* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982); *Benedetto Varchi 1503–1565*, ed., V. Bramanti (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2007, conference proceedings, December 16–17, 2003, Florence); and Salvatore Lo Re, *Politica e cultura nella Firenze cosimiana. Studi su Benedetto Varchi* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2008).
 31. Annibale Caro (1507–1566). See Annibale Caro, *Lettere Familiari*, ed. Aulo Greco (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1957–1961). To assure accuracy in his writing style, Vasari consults the current master of good literary style, Annibale Caro. See Frey, *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris*, p. 210.
 32. An analytical comparison of the prefaces or Vasari's theoretical discussion on art and the practical explanation of how to create art is beyond the scope of this work at hand. See the annotated and commented publication of Bettarini-Barocchi, *Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori*. Furthermore, this book does not engage in the debate on the authenticity and authorship on parts or sections of the prefaces. Vasari gives credit for the idea of writing the *Vite* to Paolo Giovio, the most outstanding, theologian, historian and biographer of the day (see Giovio's letters to Vasari in 2 April 1547, and 7 May 1548, in Frey, *Der literarische Nachlass Giorgio Vasaris*, pp. 196 and 198). Vasari also acknowledges the historical and literary collaboration as well as the editorial assistance in syntax and orthography of Giovanni Battista Adriani, Pietro Aretino (1492–1556), Annibale Caro, Francesco Molza (1489–1544) and Vincenzo Borghini, and he also recognizes the contribution to the Olivetan Prior, Don Miniato Pitti (1508–1563), for shaping, editing and indexing the *Vite* (see Rud, *Vasari's Life and Lives*, pp. 19, 149 and 156). For a discussion on the authorship of the *Vite*, see W. Prinz, "La seconda edizione del Vasari e la comparsa di 'vite' artistiche con ritratti," *Il Vasari* (1963), pp. 1–14; Wolfram Prinz, "I ragionamenti del Vasari sullo sviluppo e declino delle arti," in *Il Vasari: Storiografo e Artista* (Florence: Istituto di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1976), pp. 857–67; Charles Hope, "Le *Vite* vasariane: un esempio di autore multiplo," in *L'autore multiplo*, ed., A. Santoni (Pisa: Scuola Normale e Superiore, 2004), pp. 59–74; Charles Hope, "Can You Trust Vasari," *New York Review of Books*, 42, no. 15 (1985); Maurizio Dardano, "La progressione tematica nella prosa del Vasari," in *Storia della lingua e storia dell'arte in*

Italia: dissimmetrie e intersezioni, eds., Vittorio Casale and Paolo D'Achille (Florence: Cesati, 2004), pp. 331–47; and Thomas Frangenberg, “Bartoli, Giaumbullari and the Prefaces to Vasari’s *Lives* (1550),” in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 65 (2002), pp. 224–58. Frangenberg questions whether Vasari actually authored Prefaces One, Two and Three of his *Vite* and postulates that Preface One was written by the “historian and theorist,” Pier Francesco Giambullari (1495–1555), and that Prefaces Two and Three were written by “polymath, translator and amateur architect,” Cosimo Bartoli (1503–1573), and by “language theorist,” Carol Lenzoni (1501–1551). As to the Preface to the Whole Work, Frangenberg is uncertain about its authorship.

Summary of the Letters and the *Prefaces*

The Dedicatory Letters

The dedicatory letters to Duke Cosimo I de' Medici are intended to ensure the duke's continued patronage and encourage his involvement in Vasari's artistic enterprises. In the letters (Chapter One), Vasari praises his fellow artists as well as himself. At the same time, he pleads for the duke's understanding of his limited writing skills: "I have a hand rather for brushes than for the pen, and a head rather for designs than for writing."

Letter to His Fellow Artists

Vasari explains the goals of his *Vite* to his fellow artists: "For the glory of art and to honor artists." He hopes that his efforts are appreciated since he too is an artist: "I am thankful to you, he says, and rejoice to be a participant in your company, even though my role is small." (Chapter One)

Letter from Giovanni Battista di M. Marcello Adriani to Vasari

Adriani's letter to Vasari briefly recounts the names and the works of the "most excellent" ancient painters and bronze and marble sculptors (Chapter Two). The letter begins by praising Vasari for his accomplishments. Then he comments on the origins of artistic culture, mentioning the importance of Egyptian artists. He explains how the Greeks are the first to master the art of painting—Cleophantes of Corinth, Polygnotus of Thasos, Apollodorus, Zeuxis, Parrhasius, Timantes, Apelles—calling attention to male and female painters, including Marcia and Timarete. Adriani also mentions two Roman painters, Fabius and Salus. He discusses the manner of modeling with clay and enumerates the sculptors who excel in using this technique to produce bronzes, such as Phidias, Myron, Polycleitus and Lyssipus. He goes on to explain other techniques in the making of sculptures, elaborating on the creation of colossal statues and discussing the first sculptors to work in marble, such as Phidias, Praxiteles and Scopas, as well as their followers. Adriani

mentions the works of Callicrates. He then switches from a descriptive to a comparative method, differentiating between Greek and Roman sculptures and concluding with a discussion of the art of the goldsmith in ancient cultures. In his prefaces, Vasari repeats many of Adriani's references, which in turn are based on Book 35 of Pliny The Elder's *Naturalis Historiae* (Natural History), focusing on the history of ancient art, and on Vitruvius's *De architectura* (Ten Books on Architecture), a treatise on Greek and Roman architecture.

Preface to the Whole Work

Vasari explains his aim in writing his *Vite* (Chapter 3):

In honor, then, of those who are already dead, and for the benefit, for the most part, of all the followers of these three most excellent arts, Architecture, Sculpture and Painting, I will write the lives of the craftsmen of each according to the times wherein they lived, step by step, from Cimabue down to our own time.

He subsequently expands on his goal:

Now, returning to my first intention, I say that, wishing in so far as it lies within the reach of my powers to drag from the ravening maw of time the names of the sculptors, painters and architects, who, from Cimabue to the present day, have been of some notable excellence in Italy, and desiring that this my labor may be no less useful than it has been pleasant to me in the undertaking, it appears to me necessary, before we come to the history, to make as briefly as may be an introduction to these three arts, wherein those were valiant of whom I am to write the lives, to the end that every gracious spirit may first learn the most notable things in their professions, and afterwards may be able with greater pleasure and benefit to see clearly in what ways they were different among themselves, and how great adornment and convenience they give to their countries and to all who wish to avail themselves of their industry and knowledge.

Vasari goes on to discuss the creation of sculpture, noting that with this technique, the first human form was created by God Almighty [who] made man, who was the first statue." He mentions several techniques of sculpture, exploring the employment of a variety of materials in clay, wax, plaster, wood and ivory, casting in metals, every kind of chasing, engraving and carving in relief on fine stones and steel.

At this point, Vasari acknowledges the debate (*paragone*) on the subject of which of the fine arts is superior to the others. For Leonardo, it is painting, but for Michelangelo it is sculpture. "They say that sculpture embraces many more arts as kindred and has many more of them subordinate to itself than has

painting.” He then tells the reader how he is going to discuss the fine arts, at the same time explaining his limitations as a writer:

It remains for me to make excuse for having on occasion used some words of indifferent Tuscan, whereof I do not wish to speak, having ever taken thought to use rather the words and names particular and proper to our arts than the delicate or choice words of precious writers.

At the end of this preface, Vasari pleads for his readers’ indulgence for his “rough or hard labors.” The “Preface to the Whole Work” appears to end abruptly and often is not included or discussed in the various editions of the *Vite*. The reason, perhaps, is because Vasari alerts the reader that what follows the preface is a discussion of the “Three Arts of Design,” meaning an explanation of the techniques and materials employed in the fine arts: architecture, sculpture and painting. This section focuses on the techniques of the fine arts and not on the theory of art or the biographies of the artists.

Preface One

Vasari introduces a scheme of historical periodization without “infringing upon the literary and topical unity of each biography.” He explains in the first preface that the “spirit of history fulfills its real purpose by making men prudent and showing them how to live, bringing pleasure to the study of the past by making it seem to be happening in the present.” And he continues describing the sources for his historical method:

having set out to write the history of distinguished artists in order to honor them and to benefit the arts to the best of my ability, I have tried as far as I could to imitate the methods of the great historians.

Here and in the other prefaces (Chapter Four), Vasari establishes not only the historical scheme for the writings of the biographies, but also the criteria he will apply to the selection of the “most excellent” artists and the ways in which their works will be judged. The criteria consist of the study of nature—that is, the capturing of nature through imitation—and the surpassing of nature by improving on it through the canons of design. In this manner, the artist is also inventing a new art form. Vasari states:

For I know that our art consists first in the imitation of nature, but then, since it cannot reach such heights unaided, in the imitation of the most accomplished artists.

Vasari describes the origins of design from antiquity to his present time, paraphrasing most of Adriani's letter. At the end of the preface, he explains why he has included the woodblock portraits of the artists in this edition, which are missing in the 1550 edition. Vasari repeats his difficulty in writing the *Vite*:

For I have wished with these my rough labors, adumbrating their noble deeds, to repay to them in some measure the debt that I owe to their works, which have been to me as masters for the learning of whatsoever I know, rather than, living in sloth, to be a malignant critic of the works of others, blaming and decrying them as men are often wont to do. But it is now time to come to our business.

Preface Two

In this preface (Chapter Five), Vasari clearly states his intention in writing the *Vite*:

Seeing that the writers of histories...have not been content simply to narrate what has taken place, but with all diligence (have sought to) investigate the means, ways and manner which valiant men have used in carrying out their undertakings...and to ascertain the judgments, counsels and opinions of those who act, since these are in fact the causes of the happy or unhappy consequences of what is done.

Here, Vasari defines history as “the true mirror of human life.” This historical view is interpreted in the *Vite* in two parts: in the four prefaces (*proemi*) and in the biographies of the artists (*vite*). The prefaces present a cyclical view of history, determined by the laws of nature instead of by specific historical events, while the biographies explain the historical process in the evolution of each artist's accomplishments. Vasari clearly states his goal here:

In my biographies I have spent enough time discussing methods, skills, particular styles and the reasons for good, superior or preeminent workmanship; so here I shall discuss the matter in general terms, paying more attention to the nature of the times than to the individual artists.

Preface Three

In this preface (Chapter Six), Vasari sets forth the laws of design (*disegno*) as well as the laws of judgment (*giudizio*). For him, the laws of design consist of a “*regola, ordine, misura, disegno e maniera*” (“rule, order, proportion, design and manner”). Vasari defines these terms in the following manner:

Rule in architecture is the exact study of the measurements of antique buildings. Order refers to classification of all art and to the orders of architecture: Doric, Ionic and Corinthian. Proportion is the relationship of the members within the form and applies to sculpture and painting as well as to architecture. Design means the imitation of the most beautiful parts of nature, and this requires that the hand and mind of the artist be capable of reproducing them exactly upon the flat surface of the picture or relief. Manner (style) requires a more painstaking selection and combination of parts—beautiful legs added to perfect torso in order to invest one figure with every beauty of highest perfection.

Vasari further defines design as follows:

The imitation of the most beautiful things in nature is used for the creation of all figures, whether in sculpture or painting; and this quality depends on the ability of the artist's hand and mind to reproduce what he sees with his eyes accurately and correctly onto paper or a panel or whatever flat surface he may be using.

These rules guarantee the maintenance of perfect quality while allowing a rapid increase in artistic production:

Art has now been reduced to such perfection and made so easy for whoever possesses (its three basic elements) design, invention and color, that while past masters did one work in six years, masters of today can do six in one year.

For Vasari, the criteria of design include invention and color, “the perfection and bloom of art (as) a power, a boldness, a lightness, beauty and grace.” Having mastered the art of design and the technical difficulties of the making of art, artists now demonstrate independent judgment and an ability to express the most complex imagery. Here is where Vasari begins to formulate his conceit of history painting—an elaborate notion, deriving from Alberti's concept of drama (*istoria*). For Vasari, a history painting, is an imagery, which reveals *invenzione* (invention), composed of two parts: 1) style, *bella maniera*, by showing beautiful elements, harmoniously and proportionately portrayed, and 2) content, *storia*, by conceiving a subject matter that suggestively intrigues or teases the viewer. In this fashion, Vasari's history painting is the manifestation of a Mannerist work of art.

Giorgio Vasari's *Vita* (Autobiography)

The inclusion of Vasari's own biography is intended to provide an example of the biographies or *vite* as he composes them, but more importantly, to illustrate his own artistic and intellectual accomplishments (Chapter Seven). In his *vita*, Vasari writes mostly about his own artistic good fortune and his desire to

achieve social status and wealth as an artist. He includes minimal information about his personal life, portraying himself as a prudent public figure whose main goal is to work diligently:

Why should it not be in my power to obtain by assiduous study and labor some of that grandeur and rank that so many others have acquired? They, also, were of flesh and bones, as I am. Urged on, therefore, by so many sharp spurs, and by seeing how much my family expected of me, I disposed myself never to shrink from any fatigue, discomfort, vigil or toil, in order to achieve that end.

Unlike his *vita*, his correspondence and *ricordi* reveal Vasari as an individual with enormous curiosity, vast intellectual and technical knowledge and a fascination with collecting art. He had considerable integrity, originality in judgment and exquisite mastery of artistic skills. He attributes his artistic achievements to rough of hard labor and good fortune and expresses his love for art with intense ardor.

Conclusion: The Author to the Draftsmen of Design

Here (Chapter Eight), Vasari thanks God for allowing him to complete his task, as well as his fellow artists for inspiring him to compose this book. He asks understanding for his down-to-earth usage of the Florentine language and for his writing skills. He also pleads for forgiveness for his errors. His aim, he says, is to please his readers:

Now, if I have achieved the end that I have desired, which has been to benefit and at the same time to delight, that will be a supreme satisfaction to me, and, even if it be otherwise, it will be a contentment for me, or at least an alleviation of pain, to have endured fatigue in an honorable work such as should make me worthy of pity, if not of pardon, among all choice spirits.

Prolegomena to Giorgio Vasari's *Prefaces*

Let us come to matters, which are less obscure: to the attainment of
perfection in the arts, their ruin, their restoration,
or to put it better still, their rebirth.¹
—Giorgio Vasari, *Vite*

This introduction has two goals: 1) to provide a general assessment of the main concepts that Vasari and his collaborators present in the prefaces and 2) to inspire readers to make further observations and studies of these prefaces.²

In the *Vite*, Vasari composes four prefaces (*proemi*). The Preface to the Whole is a prolegomenon to the *Vite*. The three others are explanatory essays on the nature of art. Each preface precedes a particular section of the biographies.

The prefaces as well as the dedicatory letters are principally concerned with the following topics: 1) divine and human creativity; 2) influences of artistic and humanistic sources on artists' works; 3) criteria for judging the fine arts, including the supremacy of drawing (design or *disegno*) in the fine arts or arts of design, and the creation of aesthetic standards for beauty.

Vasari comments on the intellectual and scientific ability of artists by emphasizing artists' interest in mathematics, perspective, proportion and anatomy. By the sixteenth century, artists, including Vasari himself, are claiming that their work is the result of divine inspiration and that they are creative geniuses. These artists believe that they work in a manner similar to God's: they do not just imitate nature but create a *new* nature (they surpass nature) and a new beauty through inspired contact with God. These ideas have enormous repercussions on the roles of artists and on art in the sixteenth century.

Vasari compares the artist's creation of art with God's act of creating the world. God is identified as an artist and teacher who creates nature and instructs on how observe and study. For Vasari, artistic success originates from divine inspiration, innate talent, diligence and hard work:

Now the material in which God worked to fashion the first man was a lump of clay, and this was not without reason; for the Divine Architect of time and of nature, being

wholly perfect, wanted to show how to create by a process of removing from, and adding to, material that was imperfect in the same way that good sculptors and painters do when, by adding and taking away, they bring their rough models and sketches to the final perfection for which they are striving.³

For Vasari, the justification for the concept of creativity is based on an artist's spiritual and natural potential. Creativity originates from God, the supreme designer and architect of the universe. For Christianity, the artist created in God's image becomes a designer as well an imitator of the natural world. God infuses the artist's mind with His divine intellect. In the natural world, artists compose art and patrons are the promoters and protectors of the fine arts, what in the *Vite* Vasari refers to as the arts of design. Hence Vasari's prefaces and the *Vite* as a whole are about artists creating the fine arts.

Vasari's explanation of artistic creativity is fundamentally based on the Italian Renaissance tradition, which considers creativity to be present in any human activity. He envisions two stages in artistic creation. The first concerns what the painting, sculpture or building will look like. God provides this idea to artists through "divine rapture or *furor divinus*."⁴ The second state is execution, when the artist executes his intention and his skilled hand projects his invented concept on paper. The skilled draftsmanship or *disegno* that Vasari values so highly makes the ideal become concrete by means of *furor poeticus*. The stress on the imaginative and intellectual effort involved in art, which is what Vasari usually means by invention, is part of the artist's rejection of the manual status of the medieval craftsman or artisan. In his writings, Vasari relates the concept of *furor poeticus* to the creative visual arts. He observes that "many painters achieve in the first *disegno* of their work, as though guided by an inspirational fire, a measure of boldness; but afterwards, in finishing it, the boldness vanishes."⁵ Vasari visually exemplifies this type of creativity with two examples, one religious—*Saint Luke Painting the Madonna and Child*—the other secular—*Zeuxis' Helen of Troy* (Figs. 12, 13 and 14). This second subject derives from one of Pliny's stories about ancient painters: Zeuxis composed the most beautiful woman or perfect form when he selected the best features from five different young women.⁶

For Vasari, artists capture creativity or create art by means of an innate intellectual force (*ingegno*) that derives from God through invention. The nature of invention (*invenzione*) is composed of observation, imitation and assimilation from nature and classical forms:

Art owes its origin to Nature herself; this beautiful creation, the world, supplied the first model, while the original teacher was that divine intelligence which has not only made us superior to the other animals, but like God Himself, if I may venture to say it.⁷

The manner wherein artists reveal invention has two components. The first involves a design or drawing (*disegno*). This visual element is comprised of color, proportion, rule, measurement and *maniera* (artist's style).⁸ The second component of invention involves the ability to compose a visual narrative (*istoria*).

Employing both Aristotelian and Neoplatonic approaches to the writing of art history, Vasari asserts that invention sparks from a divine conception. His Neoplatonic affinities reside in the humanistic approach to conceive art as a form of beauty (goodness) as well as a form composed from the observation of nature.⁹ This notion of creation is a reconciliation between the quest to assimilate antiquity and yet maintain Christian fervor: even if an artist creates beauty, the concept of beauty ultimately derives from God. God creates the individual, and so artists as human beings are imitations of God, and artists create because they imitate their creator. Vasari says the following in Preface One:

The first image of man was a lump of clay, and not without reason, seeing that the Divine Architect of time and of nature, being Himself most perfect, wished to show in the imperfection of the material the way to add and to take away; in the same manner wherein the good sculptors and painters are wont to work, who, adding and taking away in their models, bring their perfect works of art to that final perfection which they desire.¹⁰

When Vasari postulates that art is an imitation of nature, his ideas derive from Aristotle (384–332 BCE). In his *Poetics* (335 BCE), Aristotle introduces his theory of imitation (*mimesis*) and the notion that art imitates nature,¹¹ and he goes on to develop a method of judgment and classification of art. Vasari's knowledge of Aristotle's theory of art was acquired through the writings of Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472), particularly from Alberti's *Della Pittura* (*On Painting*, 1436), as well as from Annibale Caro's translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* (c.1547). For Aristotle, the theory of imitation is based on an innate human quality: just as children learn through the process of imitation, so too do artists create art by learning to imitate nature. In his writings, Vasari conceptualizes creativity in two realms. The first is the divine realm, in which artists as children of God imitate him in creating art. The second is the human realm, in which the evolution of art is seen as a natural progression through the transformation of human life. Thus, the pedagogical association in the *Vite* reflects Vasari's classification of the three organic stages or periods of art.

With this frame in mind, Vasari methodically conceives how to compose the history of art. In the Preface to the Whole Work he defines the subject of art history, maps the beginning of the various arts, and explains the artistic

techniques that are of practical use to artists. Vasari chronologically divides his collection of artist's biographies into three books corresponding to the three periods of art history. Each of these books contains an introductory preface. It is here that he expounds his theory of art. His insights on history as "a development, a process, and not as a collocation of facts" breaks new ground in the conception of art history as "a necessary progression, and improvement."¹²

As Vasari insightfully puts forward his concept of progression, he also includes a "theory of periodicity of human accomplishments."¹³ With the assistance of humanists, historians and literati, such as Benedetto Varchi (1503–1565), Giovanni Battista Adriani (1513–1579), Cosimo Bartoli (1503–1572), Vincenzo Borghini (1515–1580), Annibale Caro (1507–1566), Paolo Giovio (1483–1552), Pier Francesco Giambullari (1495–1555) and emblematisers Andrea Alciato (1492–1550) and Pierio Valeriano (1477–1558), Vasari reveals his intention of honoring the memory of deceased artists in the 1550 edition of his *Vite*. In the 1568 edition, he goes on to include actively working artists such as Michelangelo and himself.

Adhering to Vasari's construction of the prefaces, this essay is divided into various sections. It is important to note that some of the sections may appear repetitive, but this is due to the manner in which Vasari connects his concepts of art. The essay will consider, in turn, the following subjects: the purpose of the prefaces and the *Vite*, the rebirth of art, the imitation of nature, the appropriation of classical art, the criteria for judging art, the supremacy of drawing, and the criteria for judging beauty.

Here, the author's intention is to merely present a summary of some of Vasari's main conceits expounded in the *Prefaces* and not to present the extensive scholarly debates and views on Vasari's theory of art. The aim of this book, most of all, is to allow the reader to ponder and reflect on the artistic notions expressed in Vasari's *Prefaces*.

The Purpose of the Prefaces and the *Vite*

As a sixteenth-century artist, Vasari considers himself not simply an artist, but a painter, architect, art collector, writer and theorist. His persona is reflected both textually and visually. Textual evidence is found in his writing of the *Vite* and, in particular, in the instructive discussion on the techniques of the fine arts in his sections on *Introduzione alle tre arti del disegno, cioè architettura, pittura, e scoltura, e prima* (Introduction to the Arts of Design: Architecture, Painting and Sculpture, 1558).¹⁴ Visual documentation is seen in Vasari's numerous depictions of the personifications of the arts in the paintings in his

houses in Arezzo (1542–48) and Florence (1560–63), as well as in the illustrations for the *Vite*, such as the endpiece for the 1550 edition and the endpiece of the 1568 edition (Figs. 6 and 7).

In the prefaces, Vasari unveils his art theory in which he considers the following notions: the creation of art; the imitation of nature; the periodization of history, including the concept of rebirth and affinities with antiquity; and moral judgments or religion. He put his theories into practice in his paintings as well. For example, in the Chamber of Fortune in his house in Arezzo, he personifies these concepts in the depiction of Venus to symbolize art, Diana to symbolize nature, Charity to represent religion, and Fortune to stand for the transformations and vicissitudes of life.¹⁵

In his dedicatory letter to Duke Cosimo I, Vasari explains his purpose:

I have thought that this labor which I have undertaken—of writing the lives, describing the works and setting forth the various relations of those who, when art had become extinct, first revived, and then gradually conducted her to that degree of beauty and majesty wherein we now see her, would not be other than pleasing to your Excellency.¹⁶

One of Vasari's goals in writing the prefaces is to provide a contextual history of Renaissance art, while at the same time presenting a manual for artistic practice, theory and behavior. These issues are interwoven into the Vasarian concept of "rebirth," which links the idea of artistic progress to the moral *exempla*. Vasari's idea of artistic progress is described by what he sees as the inevitable pattern of change from imperfection to perfection in the arts. And his moralizing anecdotes are related to a Cinquecento spirit of literary history, which fulfills its real purpose by making individuals prudent through anecdotal precedent.

Vasari further elaborates on the classification of how these artists are meritorious by making distinctions in their art, separating the better from the good and the best from the better. He calls attention to artists' diligent methods, their expressions, their manners, their traits and their intentions. He explores the causes and origins of their manners for improving the arts as well as creating beauty. He also comments on artists who lack diligence and waste their artistic skills.¹⁷

At the beginning of Preface Two, Vasari explains the contribution of the First Period:

In the First Part of these *Vite*, I have spoken of the nobility and antiquity of these our arts, as at that point of our work was desirable, omitting many remarks by Pliny, and other writers, of which I might have availed myself, if I had not preferred—perhaps in

opposition to the opinion of many readers—rather to permit that each should remain free to seek the ideas of others in their original sources. And this I did to avoid that prolixity and tediousness which are the mortal enemies of attention. But on this occasion it appears to me befitting that I should do what I did not then permit myself—namely, present a more exact and definite explication of my purpose and intention, with the reasons which have led me to divide this collection of *Vite* into three parts.¹⁸

Vasari goes on to give successful examples from the First Period from the art of Giotto. He notes that improvement occurs more in painting than in sculpture or architecture. Vasari describes the improvement in the Second Period in Preface Two:

In the Second Period, all productions were, obviously, much ameliorated; richer invention was displayed, with more correct drawing, a better manner, improved execution, and more careful finish. The arts were, in a measure, delivered from that rust of old age, and that coarse disproportion, which the rudeness of the previous uncultivated period had left still clinging to them.¹⁹

In Preface Two, Vasari continues comparing the First Period with the Second:

And now that we have raised these three arts, so to speak, from their cradle, and have conducted them through their childhood, we come to the second period, in which they will be seen to have infinitely improved at all points: the compositions comprise more figures; the accessories and ornaments are richer, and more abundant; the drawing is more correct, and approaches more closely to the truth of nature; and, even where no great facility or practice is displayed, the works yet evince much thought and care; the manner is more free and graceful; the coloring more brilliant and pleasing, insomuch that little is now required to the attainment of perfection in the faithful imitation of nature.²⁰

In the Second Period, Vasari considers the art of Brunelleschi, Masaccio and Jacopo della Quercia as excellent examples. He also compares the art of Masaccio with the art of Giotto. In doing so, Vasari is establishing the methodology of judging art through comparison, and, as an example, he compares the Second Period with the First Period.

As to the Third Period, Vasari writes the following in Preface Three:

Truly important was the progress towards perfection, which was secured to the arts of painting, sculpture and architecture, by means of the excellent masters whose works we have described in the second part of these *Vite*. Rule, order, proportion, design and manner, have all been added by them to the characteristics exhibited by those of the first period, if not in the utmost perfection, yet making so near an approach to the truth, that the masters of the third period, of which we are henceforward to treat, have

been enabled, by the light thus afforded them, to reach that summit which the best and most renowned of modern works prove them to have attained.²¹

Vasari goes on to praise the art of Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael and Giorgione as example of “most excellent” artists.

The Rebirth of Art

Eric Cochran, in *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance*, observes that during the Renaissance, writers on the arts successfully accomplish the transformation of the writing of biographies into the writing of history.²² Writers in the sixteenth century begin to examine ancient and modern art and artists as a result of the inspiration of ancient writers, such as Lucian of Samosata (125–180), Philostratus the Younger (active 220), Pliny the Elder (23–79) and Marcus Vitruvius Polio (80/70–15 BCE).²³ In particular, Pliny the Elder’s writings on ancient art serve as a source of inspiration not only for Adriani, but for Vasari as well. In the *Paragone* of 1547, for example, the Florentine humanist Benedetto Varchi comments on the influence of Pliny the Elder on Vasari’s *Vite*. In his art historical writings in Book 35 of *Naturalis Historiae*, Pliny situates the artists of the ancient world in a progressive historical development, and in the artists’ biographies in the *Vite*, Vasari emulates Pliny’s historical approach.²⁴ In addition, in his comments on classical architecture, Vasari relies extensively on *De architectura* (*On Architecture*, 25 BCE) by the Roman architect Vitruvius.²⁵ Yet another major source of influence for Vasari is Giovio’s *Elogia doctorum virorum* (*Praise of Illustrious Men*), published without images in Venice in 1546. In formulating his ideas about history and art history, Vasari also receives intellectual guidance from the eminent physician, historian and biographer Paolo Giovio (1483–1552).²⁶

Vasari’s purpose in writing the prefaces and the *Vite* is to provide historical perspective and artistic guidance to his fellow artists.²⁷ These two significant factors are evident in his explanation of the concept of “rebirth,” which combines progress and moral intention. Vasari’s idea of progress is described by the inevitable pattern of change from imperfection to perfection in the arts. And his moral intention is related to the Cinquecento’s spirit of history, which fulfills its real purpose in making individuals prudent and showing them how to live their lives.²⁸ Vasari aims to honor the artists by establishing criteria based on concepts of rebirth, signifying a “return,” an “improvement,” on previous art, an excelling of previous art forms, in particular, classical art. He provides an analogy of the experience of looking back at the art of the past,

selecting what is of significance from that art and incorporating that selection into a new art form or into a new artistic creation.

In the prefaces, Vasari reveals his conception of art history through the formulation of an organic scheme or historical progression. This historical view is interpreted in the *Vite* in two separate ways; one in the prefaces and the other in the biographies of the artists. The prefaces present an almost cyclical view of history, governed by the laws of nature instead of by specific historical events, whereas the biographies explain the historical process in the evolution of each artist's accomplishments. Vasari visualizes the analogy of history with a mirror's reflection of human life. In Preface Two, he defines history as "the true mirror of human life."²⁹ It is not surprising, then, that Vasari is considered to be the founder of the discipline of art history.

Vasari clearly states his quest in Preface Two:

In my biographies I have spent enough time discussing methods, skills, particular styles and the reasons for good, superior or pre-eminent workmanship; so here I shall discuss the matter in general terms, paying more attention to the nature of the times than to the individual artists.³⁰

Vasari then introduces a scheme of historical periodization without "infringing upon the literary and topical unity of each biography."³¹ He explains this in Preface Two: "The spirit of history fulfills its real purpose in making men prudent and showing them how to live, in addition to the pleasure it brings to past events, as though they were happening in the present."³² He continues describing the sources for his historical concept: "Having set out to write the history of distinguished artists in order to honor them and to benefit the arts to the best of my ability, I have tried as far as I could to imitate the methods of the great historians."³³

Vasari's *Vite* are short biographies of painters, sculptors and architects of three centuries, with critical descriptions of their works and anecdotal artists' stories. The artists he chooses and the qualities that he praises in their works reflect Vasari's views of art. His first principle is simply that a historical or chronological approach is an important means of studying art. Vasari begins with the earliest artist and then discusses each artist according to his place in time. Vasari writes only about what he calls the "most excellent" artists.

In the prefaces, Vasari establishes not only the historical scheme for the writings of the biographies but also the criteria he applies to the selection of the "most excellent" artists and the ways in which their works are judged. The criteria consist of the study of nature, the capturing of nature through its imitation, and the surpassing of nature by improving on it. Vasari refers to this endeavor as "perfecting" nature, by which he means that through the canons

of design, the "most excellent" artists can surpass nature. In Preface Two, Vasari says: "For I know that our art consists first in the imitation of nature but then, since it cannot reach such heights unaided, in the imitation of the most accomplished artists."³⁴

Today, historians find it difficult to define the Renaissance,³⁵ but they usually do agree that beginning with the poet Petrarch in the fourteenth century, humanists begin to postulate that their culture inherited aspects of classical culture as well as the historical culture of the Middle Ages. In the early Renaissance, humanists and artists alike view their period as one of a recovery of antiquity, believed lost between the fifth and twelfth centuries. By the sixteenth century, humanists, in particular, become confident that their epoch is a period of "rebirth,"³⁶ a notion embedded in Vasari's *Vite*,³⁷ with these theoretical ideas being best articulated in the prefaces.

Vasari's concept of rebirth strongly interrelates with his response to nature. In Preface One, he writes: "The origin of the arts was nature itself, and the arts of sculpture and painting were first derived from nature." For Vasari, rebirth combines several factors. The study of nature, for instance, is captured in the artist's design; the application of the design's criteria (order, rule, proportion, drawing and manner) contributes to the imitation of nature and the invention of art; and artistic growth parallels the natural stages of life (observation=birth, imitation=growth and invention=maturity). All of these considerations create a perfect art, one that surpasses nature. Vasari evaluates these artistic accomplishments within his framework of historical progression, an organic scheme of cyclical evolution. His concept of history in terms of progression encompasses as well his aesthetic theory about expression, intentionality and manifestation of visual culture.

For Vasari, art is created for delight, to reveal physical and spiritual beauty.³⁸ These aesthetic manifestations are incorporated in artistic compositions, such as in a drawing, a painting or a sculpture, and their significations are revealed in their iconography and emblematic meanings. Vasari introduces the concept of history paintings in his prefaces. However, it is in *I Ragionamenti* (Artistic Reasoning or Artistic Thoughts, 1555–88) that he elaborates on the content and signification of the images.³⁹ Vasari's concept of history painting derives from Alberti's concept of drama or *istoria* visualized in a work of part, particularly in painting.⁴⁰ For Vasari, a history painting reveals the content of historical events from the past or the present, including secular and religious themes. The secular scenes include mythological, allegorical, historical and/or literary subjects, while the religious scenes refer to Christian and non-Christian history, the lives of saints and religious figures, and the lives of Christ and Mary. For Vasari, these history paintings embody an intellectual