DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

SCULPTOR OF RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

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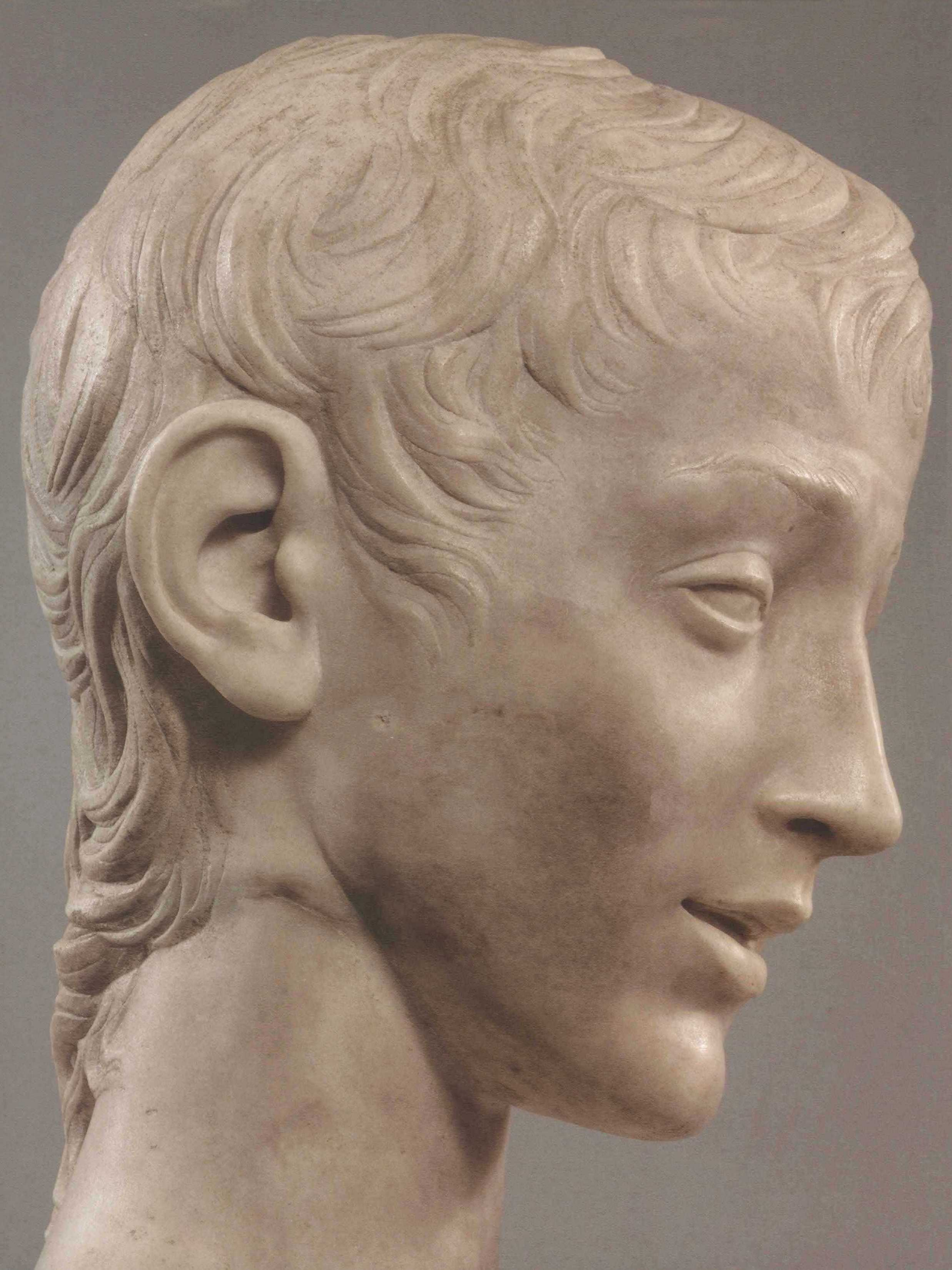

DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

SCULPTOR OF RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

Edited by
Marc Bormand
Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi
Nicholas Penny

5 CONTINENTS

National Gallery of Art
Washington

MUSÉE DU LOUVRE ÉDITIONS

This book accompanies the exhibition

DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO: SCULPTOR OF RENAISSANCE FLORENCE

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Desiderio da Settignano
Madonna and Child (The Foulc Madonna), detail
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia,
N. W30-1-2

Back cover
Desiderio da Settignano
Julius Caesar, detail
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département
des Sculptures, inv. RF 572

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Saint John the Baptist, detail
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département
des Sculptures, inv. RF 679

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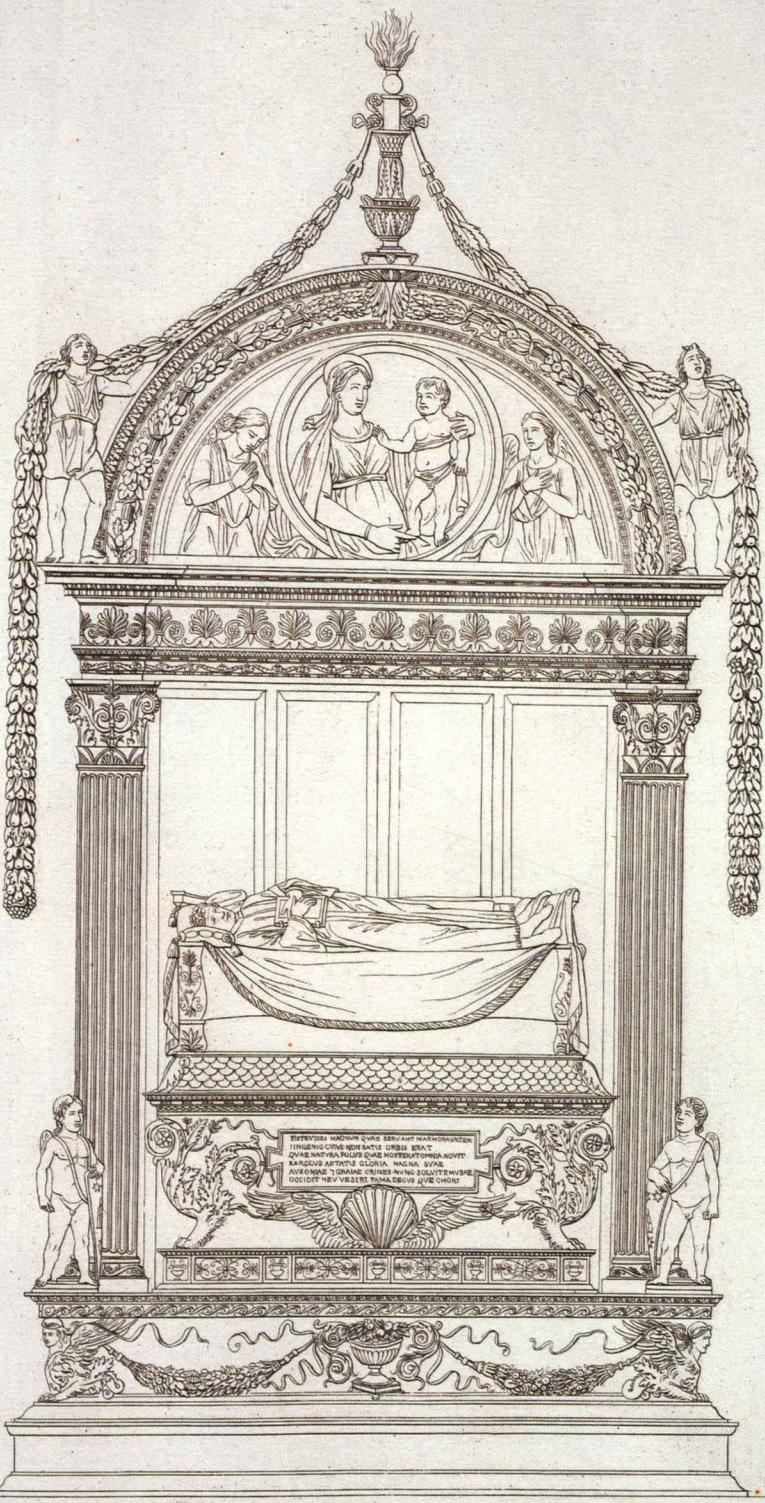
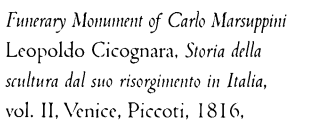
CURATORS OF THE EXHIBITION



Monumento del Marsuppini Scolpito da Desiderio da Settignano
in S.ta Croce a Firenze

Udine disegnò *Mauritelli incise.*

FOREWORD



Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini
Leopoldo Cicognara, *Storia della scultura dal suo risorgimento in Italia*, vol. II, Venice, Piccoti, 1816, pl. XIV

Desiderio da Settignano was rediscovered by scholars and collectors in the second half of the 19th century during the great revival of interest in Florentine sculpture of the quattrocento. Today, however, his name is not widely known by the general public. This exhibition is the first ever devoted to his work. It was conceived, without the pretext of a centenary, by Jean-René Gaborit, then senior curator and head of the sculpture department at the Musée du Louvre, simply to reveal the delicacy, power, and vitality of Desiderio's sculpture and to further our understanding of the artist whose short career is so incompletely documented.

Working together to ensure that the exhibition is as complete, as coherent, and as well presented as possible, the Musée du Louvre, the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, and the National Gallery of Art have each agreed to share the works by Desiderio in their care. For those who wish to gain an appreciation of Desiderio's work, the first stop at any museum must be the Salone di Donatello in the Bargello, where several of his marble sculptures may be seen in relation to masterpieces by Lorenzo Ghiberti, Donatello, and Luca della Robbia. And since 1993, the Louvre's Galerie Donatello has housed an impressive group of Desiderio's work, which came to the museum through the generosity of three great art lovers and collectors, the Marquise Arconati-Visconti, Jules Albert Goupil, and Baron Charles Davillier. At the National Gallery of Art we may note that three key works by Desiderio are central to its rich collection of Italian Renaissance art and came in fact from three of the Gallery's founding collections—those of Andrew W. Mellon, Samuel H. Kress, and Joseph E. Widener.

Now, visitors to these museums will be able to deepen their appreciation of Desiderio's exceptional technical virtuosity as a carver and of the incomparable poetry of his innovations. Thanks to this collaboration and the generosity of other museums that have agreed to contribute to the exhibition, we are confident that *il dolce e vago* Desiderio will receive the widespread esteem that he deserves.

EARL A. POWELL III
Director, National Gallery of Art, Washington

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PREFACE

A number of the works of Desiderio da Settignano entered the great sculpture collections formed in the second half of the 19th century and early years of the 20th century. From the *Portrait of a Lady*, called *Marietta Strozzi*, acquired by Gustav Friedrich Waagen in Florence in 1842 for the Berlin museum to the busts of young boys added to the holdings of the National Gallery of Art in Washington in about 1940, these sculptures filled a gap in numerous major collections of Italian Renaissance sculpture.

Bringing together a significant group of works by this artist for the first time was the principal objective of this project, initiated in 2001 by Jean-René Gaborit, then in charge of the sculpture department at the Musée du Louvre; the first contacts with the Bargello concerning this project date from that year. The last time it was possible to see sculptures by Desiderio in an exhibition in Paris was 1935, on the occasion of the major exhibition of Italian art held at the Petit Palais: just five works were presented under his name, without counting the *Martelli Saint John the Baptist*, exhibited under the name of Donatello alone. It was not until 1985, with the sculpture exhibition in Detroit, Fort Worth, and Florence, that it was again possible to see some of our sculptor's works shown alongside each other.

The collection of works brought together for this first major monographic exhibition offers a broad and varied overview of Desiderio's art, but as is often the case with sculpture exhibitions, major works cannot be included. In this case, the two greatest monuments by Desiderio, the *Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini* in Santa Croce and the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo*, are naturally impossible to transport and so are only visible *in situ* during the Florentine exhibition. The public in Florence will also be able to appreciate the *Mary Magdalene* in the church of Santa Trinita. Similarly, visitors in Paris will be able to admire the *Heroic Youth* in the Musée Jacquemart-André, where it has been affixed to the wall for the past century.

The works from the collections of the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence, Musée du Louvre in Paris, and National Gallery of Art in Washington constitute the heart of this show and stress the shared desire of the three institutions to render homage to this artist by at last dedicating a major exhibition to him. Around this already sizable core, some important pieces make it possible to strengthen certain groups of works. Where possible, we have sought to present sculptures that are widely accepted by critics as being autograph works by Desiderio, including the *Laughing Boy* of Vienna and the *Virgin and Child (The Foulc Madonna)* from Philadelphia. The comparison between the latter and the *Panciatichi Madonna*, the *Madonna and Child* of Turin, and the *Madonna and Child* of Lyon (customarily attributed to the workshop of Desiderio or to Geri, the artist's elder brother) should enable a greater stylistic appreciation of Desiderio's work on this subject. Likewise, the comparison between autograph works and some busts, such as the Goupil *Saint John the Baptist*, the *Young Deacon* from San Lorenzo, and the *Marietta Strozzi* from Berlin, whose attribution to our sculptor has at times been questioned, should make it possible to clarify a number of questions.

In the exhibition and the catalogue, works described as by Desiderio are those traditionally and widely accepted as his, leaving the authors of the essays and entries free to discuss objections or changes of attribution. Those attributions to Desiderio advanced by various authors, sometimes in the context of new critical proposals, are presented with the formula "attributed to." In many cases, the sculptures due to be exhibited have undergone restoration or cleaning, offering a clearer idea of the artist's intentions. In some cases, as with "*La Belle Florentine*," the very understanding of the work has been radically overturned by this recent restoration. And in numerous others, the restoration has given back to the works the detailed working and luminosity of the marble and delicacy of the modeling that had been lost, returning them to their original integrity.

The question of the relationship between Desiderio and Donatello constitutes an important part of the exhibition. The *Martelli Saint John the Baptist* and the problems surrounding the circumstances of its creation give an accurate idea of the complexity of the subject. The presence of the domestic altarpiece from Vienna, the central tondo of which is generally attributed to Donatello, makes it possible to understand the underlying problems. And finally, the discussion of the *Young Deacon* from San Lorenzo, often associated with Donatello, as a work by Desiderio and related to busts closely connected with him, adds a new dimension to the discussion of the relationship between the two sculptors.

Quite apart from the desire to share the beauty and strength of Desiderio's art with a wide public, the only way to deepen our understanding and analysis of the relationships between these qualities in his works is to view his sculptures side by side. The catalogue provides an initial overview of the studies of Desiderio's work, but an international meeting, organized in Florence by the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence–Max Planck-Institut and by the Villa I Tatti (Harvard University), between 9 and 11 May 2007, with the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, should further add to our knowledge of this artist and his œuvre. We are extremely grateful to the directors of these two prestigious institutions—Gerhard Wolf and Joseph Connors—as well as to all those who will be presenting papers at the conference.

Thanks to this project, we hope to restore Desiderio to an eminent position amongst the great sculptors of the second generation of "inventors" of the Florentine Renaissance. Moreover, our ambition is to move beyond the old image of this artist, who proves to be not just a supremely skillful carver and creator of extremely graceful figures, but also the inventor of powerful and moving ones, successfully balancing ideal and natural, grace and expression, with luminous results.

Marc Bormand
Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi
Nicholas Penny

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ESSAYS

Desiderio da Settignano
Detail of cat. 9
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna,
Gustav Benda bequest, inv. 9104

DESIDERIO, VASARI, AND US

Jean-René Gaborit

As with most Florentine artists of the quattrocento, only the all too brief biographical notes of Giorgio Vasari give us some sense of the personality of Desiderio da Settignano (fig. 2),[1] or so we would like to believe. The archival documents, few and for the most part disappointing, would not in themselves lead us to recognize him as one of the most important artists of his time. Vasari, on the other hand, stresses this importance succinctly but with great force.

At first reading, his text might appear a little spare: not only does Vasari nonchalantly declare his ignorance as to where the sculptor was born, but he implicitly introduces an error in the year of his birth, since he puts Desiderio's death at the age of 28, and not at 35, as may be deduced particularly from the declarations made by members of his family in the various Florentine *catasto* registries for the period concerned.[2] The only chronological indication Vasari gives ("Desiderio's sculptures were executed in 1485") is manifestly wrong. Nevertheless, he might have had some firsthand information: he had obtained a portrait of the artist from his descendants (nephews or greatnephews) in Settignano, as well as some pen and ink drawings that might have come from the same source. Better informed than Pomponius Gauricus,[3] Vasari omitted Desiderio from the list of sculptors who worked on the triumphal arch of the Castel Nuovo in Naples. Except for a single point that has itself been the object of some discussion (the funeral effigy of the Beata Villana delle Botti, for which a contract was drawn up between the Dominicans of Santa Maria Novella and another sculptor, Bernardo Rossellino[4]), the catalogue raisonné he drew up for Desiderio has been generally accepted.

Perhaps because he had neither precise biographical details nor significant anecdotes, or perhaps because he saw in Desiderio the perfect illustration of a certain "artistic type," Vasari fashioned him into the consummate example of the artist able to achieve perfection in his art without apparent effort, tiresome labor, or imitation of anyone else. For the following century, Vasari drew a similar picture of Pierino da Vinci, another sculptor, as a fine example of genius cut off by death before realizing its full potential.[5] The *Life of Desiderio* forms a sort of triptych with that of Antonio Rossellino, which precedes it, and that of Mino da Fiesole, which follows: the first figure stands out for his moral qualities, reflected in his works through their delicacy and the care taken in perfecting them; Mino da Fiesole, who closes the trio, is shown as hardworking and diligent, and perceptive enough to draw inspiration from the best models. Between these two, the art of Desiderio appears like a gift from heaven whose radiance shone beyond the rather restricted circle of "members of the profession."

Fig. 1
Desiderio da Settignano and assistants
Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini, detail of the sarcophagus
marble, ca. 1455–59
Santa Croce, Florence

Reading the epigrams and sonnets inspired by the relatively premature death of the sculptor must have confirmed Vasari in this interpretation. Were these poems as numerous as he states? He published only one, but an epitaph dedicated to Mino da Fiesole, reproduced only in the first edition of Vasari's work (1550), alludes to the *bell'arte* of Desiderio.[6] Within the constraints of a highly codified literary genre, it is nevertheless remarkable that the epigram Vasari claims to have chosen from among many others should closely link the name of Desiderio with the working of marble.[7]

Although Vasari's judgment is extremely eulogistic, there are nevertheless certain implicit reservations: for instance, the excellence of the bust of a young lady, named as Marietta Strozzi (cat. 7), is presented above all as a consequence of the beauty of the sitter; the vegetable motifs on the tomb of Carlo Marsuppini (cat. 1 and fig. 1), however finely they may be carved, cannot match those executed by artists who had fully assimilated the lessons to be learned from antique models. And in discussing this funerary monument, the most ambitious of Desiderio's projects, Vasari makes only a cursory reference to the "shield-bearers," so accessible and so admired, and briefly praises the recumbent figure. Like a certain young man who, three centuries later, visited the Salon of 1784 and admired Houdon's *Dead Thrush*,[8] Vasari marveled at the light treatment of the wing feathers on the emblematic motif below the sarcophagus. He has thus presented us with an image of Desiderio as a virtuoso at marble work, an incomparable technician, able to handle this hard, heavy material with grace and lightness. This conception doubtless explains the strange blunder of the compilers of the sale catalogue for the Debruge-Duménil collection who, in 1848, attributed the *Bust of Beatrice d'Este* to the Florentine sculptor (it was actually by Gian Cristoforo Romano; fig. 3). Now housed in the Louvre,[9] it is indeed a masterpiece as far as the fine handling of the marble is concerned, but stylistically it is poles apart from Desiderio's work. We know, too, that until the studies of Wilhelm Bode,[10] the female busts of Francesco Laurana were also attributed to the creator of the portrait of Marietta Strozzi, indiscriminately but doubtless based on the same appreciation for the handling of the marble.

Fig. 2
Portrait of Desiderio da Settignano
Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori*, Florence, Giunti, 1568
École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris

Vasari's judgment concerning Desiderio's precociousness and his excellence in the field of marble carving seems confirmed by the fact (which he either did not know or failed to mention) that the young sculptor was chosen in 1453, at the age of just 20, as one of the experts engaged to appraise the marble reliefs by Andrea Cavalcanti, called "il Buggiano," for the pulpit in Santa Maria Novella.[11] Desiderio was, moreover, the least generous of all in his appraisal, and we cannot but be tempted to agree with him.

We should nevertheless consider it singularly restrictive to see in Desiderio only a sort of specialist, one certainly exceptional and touched by grace, but whose talent was limited to that of a skilled craftsman. Even if we only take into consideration the marble works mentioned previously, the problem of Desiderio's skills as an architect cannot be completely

Fig. 3
Gian Cristoforo Romano
Bust of Beatrice d'Este
marble
Musée du Louvre, Paris,
inv. ML 10

evaded. Naturally, it is hard to judge them solely on the basis of the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo* (cat. 23), which, after undergoing a "renovation" into the baroque style (fig. 120), was since subjected to a learned reconstruction with a purism perhaps too dependent on the aesthetic of Florentine mannerism.[12] The general conception of this small monument is not Desiderio's own invention; it certainly owes much to the tabernacle executed by Donatello for Saint Peter's in Rome, which Desiderio doubtless knew indirectly. But he did realize a perfect synthesis between an architectural motif, giving visual weight to a niche of very modest dimensions, and the presentation of its significance, associating the principle of mystery with that of display: the angels in the central section surround a closed door, while the tympanum is dominated by the figure of the Christ Child who, standing on a cloud that emanates from the chalice, blesses with his right hand and holds the crown of thorns and nails of the Crucifixion in his left (fig. 5). Whether this image derives from the writings of Saint Bridget of Sweden or from certain narratives of miraculous visions matters very little: the iconography of the tabernacle combines the most strictly orthodox theological thinking with the freedom of expression often associated with acts of devotion. But it does not seem as though Desiderio's sculptures have been superimposed on an architectural schema devised by another artist; the figures structure not only the forms and space, but also the remarkably discreet play of moldings and purely decorative features.

The other major project realized by the artist seems to confirm this analysis. The tomb of Carlo Marsuppini (1398–1453; cat. 1) belongs to a type of monument, placed against a wall or inserted into a niche, whose earliest example in Florence may be the tomb of Archbishop Orso by Tino di Camaino. With the tomb of the antipope John XXIII (Baptistery of San Giovanni, Florence), Donatello had shown that the medieval concept could be perfectly well adapted to new forms. The Marsuppini tomb is thus the heir to a long tradition of which only certain elements have been retained: the depiction of the deceased (here lying on a bed of state, installed atop the cover of the sarcophagus) and the tutelary image of the Virgin holding the Child, placed in the most eminent position high in the composition, but paradoxically rather hard to see, being set in the shadow of the soffit where the very shallow relief reads almost as a grisaille painting. This concealment of the sole religious element in the tomb contrasts with the position accorded the coats of arms. They are indeed fairly small in size but given emphasis by their association with statuettes of putti, placed almost "outside the work" and evidently executed with the artist's greatest care.

If we compare this tomb to that of Leonardo Bruni (1369–1444)—a comparison that is made easy by their proximity to each other in Santa Croce and that has in fact become a sort of obligatory exercise for art history students—we cannot help but notice that in the Bruni tomb, the work of Bernardino Rossellino (earlier by some 10 years, with some critics seeing the hand of Desiderio in certain elements[13]), the architectural framework does not serve the sculpture at all: even deprived of all sculptural imagery, it could almost stand

Fig. 4
Desiderio da Settignano,
completed by Giovanni
d'Andrea (formerly attributed to
Benedetto da Maiano)
Mary Magdalene
polychrome wood, gesso,
1458–99
Santa Trinita, Florence

Fig. 5
Desiderio da Settignano
Tabernacle of San Lorenzo,
detail of Christ Child Blessing
marble
San Lorenzo, Florence

on its own. It is probable that unlike Bernardo Rossellino and many other Renaissance sculptors, Desiderio did not work as an architect, properly speaking; but there is nothing to prevent us from speculating that he might have had some original ideas to offer in this domain. The *Zibaldone* by Domenico Maria Manni, a Florentine scholar of the 18th century, has preserved the record of a payment made in 1461 to Desiderio for the design of a work for the chapel of the Madonna della Tavola in the Duomo of Orvieto, destroyed in the early 17th century. Was this a design for an architectural ensemble for the chapel (in which case, Desiderio's project was rejected in favor of one by the Sienese architect and sculptor Giovanni di Meuccio) or for an element of liturgical furniture (*pala*, tabernacle, ciborium)? However enigmatic the case may be, this matter indicates that at the end of his brief career, not only had the artist's reputation traveled beyond the borders of Florence and even Tuscany, but he was also considered capable of making proposals for a rather sizable commission.

Despite his insistence on associating Desiderio with working marble, Vasari also mentions, almost incidentally, that he produced some works in wood (an *Angel* for the Carmine and, above all, the *Mary Magdalene* for Santa Trinita, fig. 4) and some ornaments in bronze (for the pedestal of Donatello's *David*). Other sources confirm that the artist also executed some terracotta works, in particular, busts,[14] and *gessi*, plaster, or stucco objects, whose relationship with the marble works is not always easy to determine.[15] The publication of the archival texts has not, however, led to a radical revision of what has hitherto been regarded as the artist's catalogue raisonné. There seems to have been a fear of attributing too much to Desiderio. Even though a critical analysis of these texts has rendered Vasari's chronology obsolete, art historians seem to have subconsciously remained faithful to the image of an artist who died young and therefore had only a small output.[16]

This image of a superhumanly gifted, precocious artist who died young seems to have been grafted onto that of a solitary artist, one without collaborators or real disciples (though with, at the most, a few imitators). And yet Vasari himself provides us with some clues, again confirmed by archival texts, concerning Desiderio's place within a family of sculptors, whose father, Meo di Francesco, was active artistically only intermittently. Desiderio was the third of three brothers, born after Francesco and Geri. Until 1461, Desiderio shared a bottega near the Santa Trinita bridge (alle Grazie) with Geri, who was at least four years older than he.[17] Was this family context a factor that sat ill with the preconception of a free, spontaneous talent, a gift from heaven to someone who needed neither teacher nor model? And yet Vasari admitted that Desiderio was an "imitator of the style of Donato," and included our artist in the *Life of Donatello* in the list of the Florentine master's pupils. Should we conclude from this affirmation that Desiderio was truly an apprentice in his studio, or perhaps a workshop colleague or occasional collaborator? Should we, as some have tried to do, seek to identify his hand[18] in some major projects by Donatello?

However appealing such an enterprise might be, it is not without risk. Given the complexity of Donatello's œuvre, in which the most contradictory tendencies were mixed and juxtaposed, there is considerable danger of identifying genuinely Donatellesque forms

as Desideriesque, deliberately chosen by the presumed pupil as models and foundations for his own further stylistic development: illusionistic effects of flattened bas-relief faces blending fullness of contour with subtle hollowing of the planes, immense eyes, parted lips that seem to hesitate between a smile and a painful exhalation, draperies without breadth but dense and expertly drawn. Between the works of Desiderio and those of Donatello there is, thus, a sort of gray area and not a sharply drawn line separating the grace of the "sweet style" from the harsh, sometimes violent force of the artist whose personality dominated, even overwhelmed, Italian sculpture of the 15th century. A few works—above all the Pietà relief (fig. 6), now set in the lowest zone of the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo*—show that Desiderio was himself capable of force, even if in a more restrained form. But in this shift, in this "transfer of knowledge" between Donatello and Desiderio, what might have been the role of Geri, the elder brother, who could well have been the guide or indeed the teacher of his younger brother, even if the latter were more gifted? Or was Geri merely a rather lusterless imitatòr, responsible for the "second edition" of some of Desiderio's compositions, or of reliefs "in the style of Desiderio" too mediocre to inspire a search for the master's hand, or even to be considered 19th-century pastiche copies?

Should we believe, instead, that the true teacher of Desiderio (and of Geri?) was Bernardo Rossellino (1409–64), 20 years older and a master who, during Donatello's long stay in Padua (1443–53), was at the head of the best sculpture workshop in Florence? Such a relationship would better explain the confusion previously mentioned concerning the name of the artist responsible for the tomb of Beata Villana. In that case, the influence of Donatello over Desiderio would have been exerted through his works and not within the framework of a teacher-pupil relationship. It is a shame, of course, that the two most comparable works of each artist, at least from a typological point of view—the tomb

Fig. 6
Desiderio da Settignano
Tabernacle of San Lorenzo,
detail of Pietà
marble
San Lorenzo, Florence

slab of Giovanni Crivelli (†1432) by Donatello, in the church of Santa Maria d'Aracoeli in Rome, and that of Gregorio Marsuppini by Desiderio, at the foot of the tomb of his son, Carlo, in the church of Santa Croce—should be so worn as to render impossible any study of the details. We can nevertheless observe that while the flattened treatment of the drapery is fairly similar, Donatello resorted to the fictive architecture of a niche to create a sense of depth around the recumbent figure, whereas Desiderio manifestly used only the resources of pictorial relief to suggest volume.

There is a final suggestion made by Vasari in the last lines of his text that seems to have excited little curiosity amongst scholars: did Desiderio leave a corpus of drawings? Vasari speaks of pen and ink drawings; two *Projects for an Altar*, preserved in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, have been attributed to him.[19] This brings us back to the problem of Desiderio's ability and originality, as previously discussed, in the field of small-scale architecture. It has been suggested that some large sketches found under the plaster coating the walls at Santa Croce are from his hand.[20] But might Desiderio not have executed some pen and ink drawings without any direct, immediate connection with his sculpted works? The problem arises in almost identical terms for Donatello, and no answer capable of inspiring a broad consensus amongst specialists has yet been found.

The *Life of Desiderio* that Vasari left us, like his lives of many quattrocento artists, is both irreplaceable and irritating: it has the immense merit of establishing the principle that he was a great artist, but it has also partly concealed his originality and even more so his range. The latter intrigues us as much as it does the visitor who, in Florence, passes from the exquisite Christ Child in San Lorenzo to the melancholic Mary Magdalene in Santa Trinita (figs. 5 and 4). Despite the limitations imposed by an exhibition, always severe in the case of sculpture, it will perhaps be possible to find some answers to these questions. For many visitors, it will above all provide the opportunity to rediscover an artist who was passionately admired a century ago and who unfortunately has since acquired a completely undeserved reputation for a slightly bland prettiness.

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1. Vasari-Milanesi 1906 (reprint of 1878–1885 ed.), III, pp. 107–13; Vasari-Chastel 1989, IV (3rd ed. of Vasari-Chastel 1983), pp. 115–21.
2. Kennedy 1930, pp. 259–60, 261, 263–64, 269, 270–72, 276–80, 285–86.
3. Gaurico 1969, pp. 258–59 and note 47. Pomponius attributed the bronze doors of Castel Nuovo to Desiderio, but they were actually executed by "Guglielmo Monaco" in 1462–68.
4. Becherucci 1932; Markham Schulz 1977, pp. 60–69 and pp. 107–11 (cat. 7), figs. 97–100.
5. Vasari-Milanesi, VI, p. 119.
6. Vasari-Milanesi, p. 125; Vasari-Chastel, p. 132.
7. Vasari-Milanesi, p. 111; Vasari-Chastel, p. 119.
8. Grimm, *Correspondance littéraire*, pub. Tourneux, XI, p. 529, quoted by Louis Réau, Houdon, Paris, 1964, I, p. 422: "Does one make feathers out of marble?"
9. *Description of the works of art forming the collection of M. Debruge Duménil*, no. 103, p. 9: "This bust is attributed to Desiderio da Settignano, one of the most skilled Italian sculptors of the 15th century." Purchased by the Louvre at the sale, 26 January 1850, for 6,400 francs, inv. ML 10.
10. Bode 1888, p. 245.
11. Kennedy 1930, pp. 264–65.
12. Cardellini 1956, pp. 68 and 75; Parronchi, 1965, p. 130 and pl. LI.
13. Markham Schulz 1977, pp. 43–45 and pp. 99–106, figs. 53, 55, 56, 64–68.
14. Coonin 1995-2, p. 792.
15. Kennedy 1930, p. 257; Lisner 1958, pp. 58–59; Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 286–92; Strom 1982; Middeldorf 1978.
16. In questioning the authenticity of certain sculptures, sometimes famous ones, the studies of Deborah Strom (Strom 1982, pp. 132–35; 1983, p. 9; 1984, p. 37) have helped reduce Desiderio's catalogue raisonné and increase the catalogue of pastiches produced in the 19th century.
17. Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 125–43.
18. Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 257–64; Darr. Preyer 1999, pp. 728–31.
19. Planiscig 1942, p. 20 and pl. 16 (*Study of the Virgin*, Uffizi, Florence); Coonin 1995-3, pp. 101–2, figs. 51–52 (London, Victoria and Albert Museum, inv. 4903 and inv. 4904).
20. Exh. cat. Florence 1986, no. 62 (Museo dell'Opera di Santa Croce, Florence).

DESIDERIO IN THE WORKSHOP: MASTERS AND PUPILS, WORKS AND CLIENTS MENTIONED IN THE DOCUMENTATION AND SOURCES

Giancarlo Gentilini

Blessed by "Heaven" and "Nature" with "the utmost grace," Desiderio was endowed with the "truly celestial gift" of bringing forth his works "without effort," almost without "study," says Vasari, describing a sculptor whose brief, luminous passage through the world suggests a comet that appears and then vanishes into the darkness. It is a biography in which masters, collaborators, and disciples are not discussed, it being sufficient for us to know that he was an "imitator of the style of Donatello."[1]

Of the innumerable followers and "imitators" of Donatello, Desiderio da Settignano was the only one to be celebrated by his contemporaries with a respect equal to that accorded the master: the pair were described, during their lifetimes, as "*duos sculptores preclarissimos*" in the *Elogio*—the encomium of Cosimo de' Medici written by Antonio Benivieni, a young humanist devoted to anatomical research.[2] Ugolino Verino declared that they rivaled the great sculptors of antiquity and that Desiderio was not inferior to Scopas and Praxiteles.[3] Cristoforo Landino went so far as to suggest that Desiderio was superior to Donatello himself, because, "if death had not snatched him away very young," he would certainly "have achieved the greatest perfection."[4]

In the image suggested by the sources and described, not incidentally, by the famous verse of Giovanni Santi, the father of Raphael—"the graceful Desyder, so sweet and beautiful"[5]—the young sculptor is immune to the "physical weariness" and "prodigious sweat mixed with dust and converted into mud" that demean the profession of the sculptor, as does every manual aspect of this "most mechanical exercise," as Leonardo described this art.[6] It was Leonardo who understood, better than any other, how to interpret the "pictorial" lesson of Desiderio's evanescent, atmospheric reliefs as well as the ineffable grace of his "heads of putti" and "laughing women."[7] Desiderio seems suited for neither the chisel nor the bustling, crowded environment of a workshop or construction site. This artist, who with proverbial dedication and slowness[8] "greatly polished his works," seems rather to have breathed his "delicate and charming"[9] marbles into being in the intense and rarefied atmosphere of a painter's studio.

Although this is the "myth" suggested by the 15th-century sources, handed down to us in Vasari's biography and inflated by 19th-century fancy,[10] the "life" that appears between the lines of these same biographical notes is in many respects very different.

Fig. 7
Desiderio da Settignano (attributed to), after a design by Donatello
One of the Four Tapering Bases (forming part of a monumental tabernacle for the Basilica of San Lorenzo?), detail of a cherub
marble, ca. 1455
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. Sculture 173

From Settignano to Florence: Desiderio and Geri's Workshop near Santa Trinita

Desiderio was born between 1428 and 1431 (perhaps 1429/30) on the hill of Settignano,[11] a site of quarries for the simple *pietra serena* used and diffused in the architecture of Brunelleschi and for the harder *macigno* used in Donatello's sculptures. Both stones were extracted and "ceaselessly worked by the stonecutters and sculptors born in that place." As Michelangelo claimed concerning his own placement with a Settignano wet nurse,[12] Desiderio probably drank in "the chisels and mallet" with his mother's "milk." His father, Francesco di Bartolo, called Meo di Ferro (1381/82–1459/61), worked in the household "garden" (*orto*) with "no income" according to the 1427 *Portata al Catasto*. In the 1451 version he described himself as a "stonecutter" (*scharpellatore*), adding that his three sons Francesco (1411/13–1469/71), Geri (1422/24–1461/69), and Desiderio were also involved in this "aforesaid art."

The first to take up the work independently was perhaps Geri, who matriculated as a "stonecutter" with the Arte dei Maestri di Pietra e Legname (Guild of Masters of Stone and Wood) in 1447, followed by Francesco in 1451 and Desiderio on 29 June 1453. By this date his father too had become a member, and all four of them were registered with the right to work "in the city," where they may have been involved with another prolific family of stonecutters, sculptors, and architects from Settignano who had for some time been established at major work sites in Florence. This was the Gamberelli family, that is, Bernardo Rossellino (1407/10–1464) and his brothers, among whom the young Antonio (1427/28–1479 ca.) excelled.[13]

The growing opportunities that Florence offered skilled laborers in the working and dressing of different types of stone and marble soon convinced Geri and Desiderio to set up "an artistic workshop of stonecutters at the Santa Trinita bridge." From Antonio di Giovanni Panciatichi they rented a *chasolare*, or rather a work space with several rooms, possibly used previously by carpenters, in the 14th-century Palazzo Gianfigliazzi in Via Tornabuoni, next to the church of Santa Trinita.[14] The *Portata al Catasto* of March 1458 informs us that at the time the workshop was well established, with "works completed by us worth about 100 lire." And despite an understandable tendency to play down the success of the business, the next *catasto* declaration, of December 1459, reveals that "we do a little stone-dressing," indicating further development, with the declaration of "about thirty florins worth of merchandise and debts owed us." Unfortunately, we do not know the date the business was established, though it probably fell between 1451, when Meo di Ferro's three sons still lived with their father in Settignano in a house rented from the Abbey of Vallombrosa, and May 1456, when Geri and Desiderio were able to buy a comfortable house in Via Santa Maria (today Via Buonarroti) in the parish of San Pier Maggiore in Florence.[15]

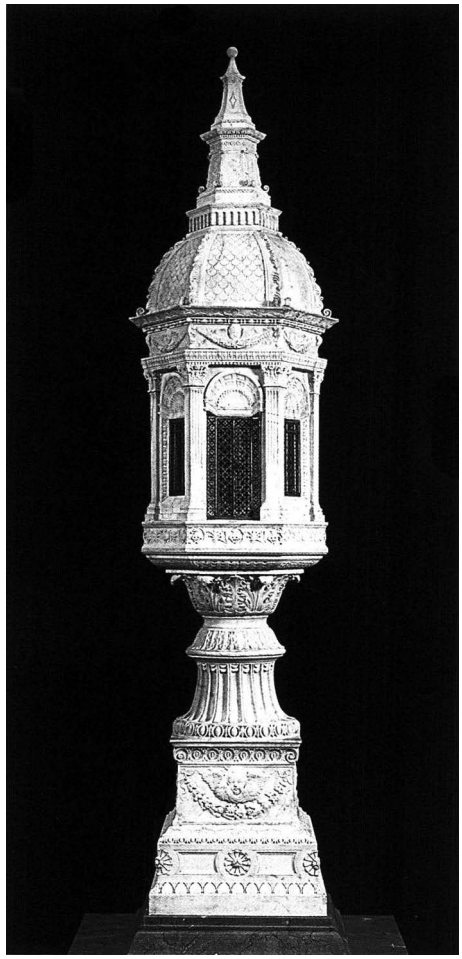

Fig. 8
Desiderio da Settignano and Benedetto da Maiano, with modern additions
"Ciborium" from San Pier Maggiore
marble, ca. 1463–65
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection, inv. 1952.5.100

Fig. 9
Assistant of Desiderio da Settignano (Gregorio di Lorenzo), after a design by Donatello
One of the Four Tapering Bases (forming part of a monumental tabernacle for the Basilica of San Lorenzo?), detail of a cherub
marble, ca. 1455
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. Sculture 172

The workshop in Santa Trinita was probably already in operation on 5 September 1455, the day on which Desiderio, a "sculptor from Santa Maria in Settignano," appears among the witnesses to a contract signed in the church of Santa Trinita.[16] It must have been opened shortly after his registration with the guild in June 1453, and probably before April 1455, when the shop began to receive a remarkable series of pressing commissions from the enterprising art dealer Bartolomeo Serragli, a supplier to the Medici and Aragonese court in Naples.[17] These commissions presuppose a workshop that was already well organized, efficient, and productive. The commissions were for marble sculptures, such as "a Virgin Mary" (April 1455), which was certainly a low relief for private devotion, and various "heads," that is, busts in the round or in relief, of either sacred or profane subjects (August 1455; October 1456). Some of these busts were recorded in pairs, as in the note of December 1457, which could refer either to Jesus and John the Baptist as children, or to two images *all'antica* for a *studiolo*. Others were produced in series—like the "12 heads" (August 1455), doubtless profiles of the 12 Caesars whose biographies Suetonius wrote—and perhaps executed in stone. But there were also payments for more ordinary stone products, such as two "wall basins and a chimneypiece" (May 1456). As further confirmation of what has been proposed, the documents in question mention certain collaborators already established and trusted in 1455, who were authorized to receive payments on Desiderio's behalf: "Gianni, who works with him" (23 August), "Chiricho di Lorenzo" (5 April), and "Ghiroghoro, who works with him" (11 and 26 August). The latter personality can now be identified with Gregorio di Lorenzo, the bizarre and eclectic sculptor otherwise known as the Master of the Marble Madonnas.[18]

Fig. 10
Desiderio da Settignano
(attributed to)
Harpy
marble, 1456–59
Fragment of the plinth of
Donatello's *David*
made for the Medici?
Chigi-Saracini Collection, Siena

It is thus probable that, despite his young age, Desiderio quickly showed great ability in marble figurative sculpture, perhaps the result of solid training with Bernardo Rossellino, side by side with his contemporary Antonio, along with whom Desiderio was invited, on 26 February 1453 when he was not yet registered with the guild, to appraise the "4 narrative scenes in marble" (*4 storie di marmo*) sculpted by Buggiano for the pulpit of Santa Maria Novella and paid for by Andrea Rucellai. It is also likely that Desiderio took over management of the workshop, relegating the stone objects and ornamental work to Geri (who, it seems likely, had previously worked extensively among the stonecutters from Settignano), perhaps helped by the elderly Meo di Ferro and his older brother Francesco, who still lived in Settignano. Such a division of responsibilities and skills in this well-organized, family-run workshop, expert in multiple techniques, seems to be confirmed by the different levels of taxation imposed by the

catasto office in 1459—Desiderio "*soldi 4*," Geri "*soldi 3*," Francesco "*soldi 2*"—and above all by a document of May 1461 relating to the division of the assets of the three brothers. Desiderio was assigned "*omnes lapides marmorei qui sunt in dictis apotecis*" at Santa Trinita "*et res sculte terre*," that is, the marble and the works in terracotta. Geri, on the other hand, was assigned "*omnes lapides macigni*" (everything made of sandstone), and was supposed to pay Francesco compensation of 21 florins.[19] Nonetheless, this evidence should not lead us to assume that distribution of work was actually so rigid, especially in the mid-1450s. On this point it is opportune to remember the comment of Filarete in his *Treatise on Architecture*, dedicated to Piero de Medici in 1464 but written beginning in 1461, taking note of what he had seen during his visit to Florence in 1456–57: Desiderio, who had already merited four mentions as an "absolute master," along with Donatello, Luca della Robbia, Michelozzo, and Bernardo Rossellino, was described as a "carver of marbles and stones."[20]

Fig. 11
Desiderio and Geri da Settignano, after a design by Donatello?
Boni Coat of Arms, Supported by a Small Angel
pietra serena, 1456–58 ca.
Detroit Institute of Arts, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Edsel B. Ford, inv. 41.124

Other known documents relating to Desiderio da Settignano's activity between 1456 and 1462, along with Vasari's biography of the artist, provide a concrete image of a busy, modern, multipurpose workshop, full of enterprising spirit, executing a wide variety of products in an equally wide variety of materials and techniques, supported by young and promising collaborators, and in close relation to the greatest masters of the time. The workshop was also favored by a particularly prestigious clientele, most of whom belonged to the Medici circle, but including patrons from outside the city: for instance, in 1462 the Duke of Milan, Francesco Sforza, wished to order at least three "beautiful" Madonnas by Desiderio, two "of plaster adorned with gold, and colored," and one possibly "of marble" or, alternatively, "in fired stone" (terracotta) or any other "material," whether stone or bronze, for which he would pay "what you will provided it is worthy." However, Desiderio evaded this order, declaring himself "obliged [to work] for some time yet on certain works here in San Lorenzo."[21] All of this suggests that the sculptor, though flourishing and highly regarded, was nevertheless reluctant to take on too many orders and that, as the letter sent to the duke by his agent in Florence affirms, the workshop was completely without any ready products for the market in general. These circumstances may have been partly due to his separation from Geri and the diaspora of many of his collaborators, such as Gregorio di Lorenzo and, it would seem, Andrea del Verrocchio, both previously engaged to work on projects of a monumental nature.

Marble to Stone: Busts, Reliefs, Statues, and Monuments

As demonstrated by Serragli's commissions, the most admired and distinctive products from Desiderio's workshop were delicate marble

sculptures, made for private worship or as domestic furnishings. Of these Vasari emphasizes the "heads of women and youths" for their "grace," "loveliness," and their capacity to express the complexity and variety of the "emotions." He records that Desiderio "portrayed from life, likewise in marble, the head [or bust] of Marietta degli Strozzi, who was so beautiful that the result was a most excellent work." This portrait was also mentioned in the *Libro di Antonio Billi* and is today usually identified with the celebrated bust in Berlin (1456/58 ca.; cat. 7).[22] Nor does Vasari neglect the "many marble low reliefs (*bassi rilievi*) that he made,"[23] alluding to the many versions of the *Madonna and Child*,[24] but considering that the only work worthy of explicit mention—in this case also according to a judgment of quality that is still valid—was a tondo depicting the "head of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of John the Baptist as a little boy," today in the Louvre (1455 ca.; cat. 12), and at the time preserved "in the private rooms (*guardaroba*) of the Lord Duke Cosimo" along with "several" other reliefs of unspecified subjects. Similar works were not lacking in the Medici household, where the inventory of Lorenzo the Magnificent's property recorded "a marble head [or bust] in the round, by the hand of Desiderio," appraised at 3 florins, and in Piero's room "a story of fauns and other figures by the hand of Desiderio," valued at a full 10 florins, and also "two laughing heads above the wall basin" in the "large ground-floor hall." These were also probably made of marble and of great quality, as they were assigned a value of 13 florins. This reference unavoidably suggests one of Desiderio's greatest masterpieces, the *Laughing Boy* in Vienna (1458/60 ca.; cat. 9).[25]

Such masterful workmanship on low reliefs and *stiacciati*, which require the ability to create virtual volumes and perspectival spaces, was particularly suited to the production of tomb slabs that were made to be set in church floors, very popular in the mid-15th century and especially employed in Franciscan churches. Vasari describes "a large stone slab," "with a very beautiful low relief" portrait of Gregorio Marsuppini (referred to by Vasari mistakenly as "messer Giorgio"), a "famous Doctor," which was placed in Santa Croce "at the foot of the tomb" of his son Carlo (1456/58 ca.; cat. 1).

The sources and documents traced so far do not mention examples of autonomous marble statuary, with the exception of the small Christ Child blessing, "a child of marble in the round" in the tabernacle of the Sacrament in San Lorenzo (1458/60 ca.; cats. 23–26), which was temporarily "removed" and "set up on the altar … as an admirable work."[26] They dwell with amazement, however, on certain monumental "furnishings" (*arredi*) in which statues and reliefs bring life to elaborate and innovative architectural structures enriched with highly refined decoration. This refers in particular to the "chapel" in San Lorenzo that Desiderio "finished in marble" with "great diligence,"[27]

Fig. 12
Desiderio and Geri da Settignano
Fireplace from Palazzo Boni
pietra serena, 1455–57 ca.
Victoria and Albert Museum,
London, inv. 5896-1859

Fig. 13
Desiderio da Settignano
Exterior Frieze on the Portico of the Pazzi Chapel, detail of the tenth cherub in a medallion, on the left
pietra serena, ca. 1460
Santa Croce, Florence

executing "the marble Sacrament altarpiece with its ornaments" (1457 ca.–61), among which the famous putto is mentioned.[28] There is also a lost "tabernacle set up on a column" for the Benedictine nuns of the Santissima Annunziata delle Murate, containing "a little Madonna with a lovely and graceful manner, so that both elements are very highly esteemed and very greatly prized," as Vasari judiciously underscores.[29]

And there is of course the monumental tomb of the learned chancellor of the Republic of Florence, Carlo Marsuppini, erected by Desiderio in Santa Croce under the patronage of the Medici and Martelli families (1455 ca.–59; cat. 1). It was the most ornate and figurally rich of the early Renaissance humanist tombs, almost as though the sculptor had wished to emulate and surpass, in splendor and grace, nature and artifice, the tomb built opposite for Leonardo Bruni by Bernardo Rossellino (fig. 49), on which Desiderio had perhaps collaborated during his youth. The Marsuppini tomb "not only amazed the craftsmen and the knowledgeable people who saw it then, but still fills with wonder all who see it today," claimed Vasari, praising the "foliage" on the sarcophagus, which was "considered most beautiful," particularly as at that time "few antiquities had been discovered," as well as the other imaginative and virtuoso decorations, like the "feathery" wings, the shell (p. 123) "more real than if it were made of an actual shell," the effigy of the deceased "portrayed from nature" with "consummate excellence and art," "some children and some angels, executed in a beautiful and lively manner," and the medallion with the *Madonna and Child* "wrought in the manner of Donatello," in other words, *stiacciato*, "with judgment and most marvelous grace."[30]

Stone Furnishings and Decorative Sculpture

Stone furnishings did not need figural sculpture to be beautiful,[31] and Desiderio's output must have included a successful line of aniconic works, sustained by his sophisticated ornamental sensibility[32] and solid architectural training. Vasari recognized this aspect of Desiderio's talent in the marble ciborium in San Pier Maggiore where, "even though there are no figures in this work, it shows a beautiful manner and infinite grace, like his other works."[33] Removed when the church was demolished in 1784, this "most beautiful ciborium" in the form of a "little building with eight sides," was described in detail, with admiration, in Bocchi's "guide" to Florence.[34] This description allows us to identify it as the tabernacle, reconstructed from fragments of the original, which is today in the National Gallery of Art in Washington (fig. 8). Much of the tabernacle (ca. 1463–65) can be attributed to Benedetto da Maiano, who may have completed it after Desiderio's death.[35]

His architectural skills, perhaps acquired through an apprenticeship with Bernardo Rossellino, are further documented by a lost "design" for the "construction" of the

chapel of the Madonna della Tavola in the Duomo in Orvieto. Desiderio prepared this design between April and October 1461, in competition with Giuliano da Maiano and the very young Verrocchio, who were all considered "suitable masters" for such a project.[36] The inspired decorative talent he brought to the invention of innovative furnishings is further exemplified by the celebrated *basamento* in the form of a column that he executed to support Donatello's bronze *David* at the center of the courtyard in the recently built Palazzo Medici. Identifiable in two fragments now in the Chigi-Saracini collection in Siena (fig. 10) and the Museo Horne in Florence, this pedestal was carved by Desiderio with "certain very beautiful marble harpies" and "some vine-tendrils in bronze, very beautiful and well conceived" (1455/59 ca.).[37]

But this aptitude for stone furnishings and decorative sculpture inevitably manifested itself above all in the working of stone, which, as we have seen, was a traditional and principal activity in the brothers' workshop, and for the most part the responsibility of Geri.[38] In addition to the fireplace and wall basins made in 1456 for Serragli, we know from documentation that in spring 1458 "Desiderio the stonemason (*lastraiuolo*) at Santa Trinita" was hired by Vittore Ghiberti "to make two small windows above the loggia on the main house" of the country property that Vittore had inherited from his father Lorenzo at San Giuliano a Settimo.[39] Sources also record "on the facade of the house of the Gianfigliazzi family, a large coat of arms with a lion, very beautiful"[40] and "other things in stone" to be seen in Florence, probably "other coats of arms."[41]

Fig. 14
Desiderio da Settignano, completed by Giovanni d'Andrea (formerly attributed to Benedetto da Maiano)
Mary Magdalene, before restoration
polychrome, wood, and gesso, 1458–99
Santa Trinita, Florence

This calls to mind the armorial bearings, architectural moldings, and fireplaces with heraldic decorations in the houses that were at that time under construction by three wealthy and influential Florentines recorded as Geri's and Desiderio's debtors in the 1458 *Portata al Catasto*.[42] One was Luigi Tegliacci, who had begun work in 1457 on a magnificent palace on the Lungarno near Santa Trinita, quite close to the workshop, but then sold the palace in 1459 with "all the carved and uncarved stones, inside and outside said house" to the Gianfigliazzi.[43] The others were Bartolomeo Lenzi and Lodovico Boni, the latter responsible for the construction of a splendid building, demolished in the early 19th century, near Santa Maria Maggiore (1455–58 ca.). From the Boni palace came two imaginative items of stone furnishing ascribed to Desiderio and Geri da Settignano: the well-known fireplace today in the Victoria and Albert Museum (1455/57 ca.; fig. 12) and the majestic coat of arms in the Detroit Institute of Arts (1458 ca.; fig. 11). The Detroit coat of arms was mentioned by Vasari and described by Bocchi as a "very lovely" work by Donatello, who may have designed it.[44] Then there is the more famous, dynamic, and refined *Martelli Coat of Arms* recently

Fig. 15
Desiderio da Settignano
(attributed to)
Virgin
polychrome terracotta, ca. 1452
Fragment of a *Virgin and Child*
Santa Maria della Misericordia,
Correggio
(reserve holdings, Museo Civico)

Fig. 16
Desiderio or Geri da Settignano
Young Woman ("Ford or Valori Lady")
pietra serena, ca. 1453–55
Detroit Institute of Arts,
Gift of Mrs. Edsel
B. Ford in memory of her
husband, inv. 48.152

purchased by the Bargello (1458/60 ca.; fig. 45), which probably once adorned the facade of the palace in Via Larga built between 1446 and 1458 by Roberto Martelli. Roberto was a patron of Donatello, who, according to Vasari, gave him the marble *Saint John* that it is argued here was completed by Desiderio. We may assume that Roberto was also on close terms with Desiderio, since in April 1460 he agreed to pay off some of the sculptor's debts to Simone Bacelli and to the stone- and woodworkers guild, the Arte dei Maestri di Pietra e Legname.[45]

It is possible that Desiderio also made some decorative sculptures in either stone or marble for Giovanni Rucellai, destined for his innovative palace designed by Alberti and built, perhaps by Bernardo Rossellino, between 1446 and the early 1450s. Alternatively, they might have been intended for a religious building under the patronage of the Rucellai, such as San Pancrazio and Santa Maria Novella, churches that had been splendidly adorned as a result of Giovanni's enlightened benefaction.[46] Rucellai recorded in his *Zibaldone* in about 1470 that "in our house" (that is, in the possession of our family) there were "many works of sculpture and painting, wood and stone inlay by the best masters who have been active, not just in Florence but in Italy, for a long time."[47] He listed Desiderio with the Settignano carver Giovanni di Bertino—who was responsible in 1458–60 for an element in the facade designed by Alberti for

Santa Maria Novella, the marble portal decorated with a festoon in a style consistent with Desiderio's taste.[48] Rucellai described them both as "masters of the chisel," unlike Andrea del Verrocchio, whom he referred to as a "sculptor and painter."[49]

Desiderio's most demanding and celebrated job of this kind was undoubtedly the decoration he produced for the Pazzi Chapel, the chapter house of Santa Croce. Albertini's guide informs us that Donatello, Luca della Robbia, and Desiderio "did many things" there.[50] Desiderio's contribution can be identified with the stone frieze on the portico that had been added to Brunelleschi's building, perhaps by Giuliano da Maiano in about 1460. The frieze is punctuated by some 58 medallions, each containing an animated and poetic angel's head (fig. 13), each wearing a different expression, facing each other in pairs. The late dating—between 1459 and 10 July 1461, the date in an inscription recently discovered on the small dome of the portico—seems to be supported by the exuberant sculptural qualities and lively variety of emotional states portrayed. This dating invalidates and in effect overturns the conception of Desiderio's development proposed by Cardellini.[51] The clear disparity between the cherubim on the exterior frieze, which are soft, delicate, light, and unpredictable, and those on the inner side, where the carving is drier, more defined, and pedantic, reveals the stylistic, technical, and qualitative differences that existed between Desiderio and, perhaps, his brother Geri just before they divided the workshop.[52]

Sculptures in Wood, Bronze, and Terracotta

Along with the many works made by Desiderio in marble and stone, Vasari's account of the sculptor's life also mentions two wooden sculptures. This genre was not in accordance with Vasari's tastes or with the expressive tendencies of Desiderio, if it is true that "wood never gives that fleshy quality or softness that we find in metal and marble, or in other sculptures made of stucco or wax or terracotta."[53] The two sculptures are a lost "wooden angel" once in the Brancacci Chapel at Santa Maria del Carmine, and the famous *Mary Magdalene* in Santa Trinita (figs. 4, 14, 40), "more beautiful than words can express." The Magdalen, which Desiderio "left only roughed out," as Albertini had already observed, and which "was afterward completed by Benedetto da Maiano,"[54] has a fundamentally Desideriesque conception, but its naturalistic surface is consonant with the style of Benedetto.[55] Recently discovered documents reveal that this statue was commissioned from Desiderio between October and December 1458 by Annalena Malatesta, the daughter of Count Galeotto, who had settled in Florence and founded, in 1455 with the help of the Medici, the well-known convent of Dominican tertiary nuns in Via Romana. In January 1459 the sculptor was urged to proceed with the work with greater diligence, perhaps receiving a further payment in August.[56] We are informed that the statue remained "incomplete" (*imperfecta*) on the death of the master, but that the rather substantial task of completing it was actually carried out many years later (in October 1499), for the large sum of 25 florins, by a sculptor less renowned than Benedetto da Maiano—a certain Giovanni d'Andrea, who is recorded as Verrocchio's assistant in 1469–70.[57]

With regard to the autograph status of this work and to Desiderio's various collaborators, it should be noted that the payment of 25 August 1459, whose motivation is not specified, was made to Desiderio through the sculptor and caster Pasquino da Montepulciano who, along with the master, had been among the witnesses to a notarial act signed a few days earlier, on 6 August, by Annalena Malatesta herself.[58] It is to Pasquino that one of the more intriguing and problematic "Desideriesque" busts has recently been ascribed: the limestone portrait in the Berlin Museum known as the *Princess of Urbino* (1455 ca.; fig. 87).[59] Pasquino—who may have joined the workshop after the 1455 departure for Dalmatia of Maso di Bartolomeo, with whom he had previously collaborated—specialized chiefly in the casting and working of metals: thus it may be more useful to consider him as the one responsible for the lost bronze "vine-tendrils" on the base of Donatello's *David* for the Medici, executed in this same period (1455/59 ca.).[60] Others who might have been responsible for these are Vittore Ghiberti, associated with Desiderio in 1458 as we have seen,[61] or the young Verrocchio, trained as a "goldsmith" (*orafo*), who came to work on the Marsuppini monument in about 1457, as will be seen. The works of both demonstrate virtuosity in the production of bronze foliage.

Such relationships, no less than this highly praised metal-casting work, suggest a production of metal objects and sculpture not limited to this single episode. Pomponius Gauricus later recorded Desiderio among the "sculptors in bronze who have won fame" in "our age," adding, almost as an afterthought, how he "also sculpted marbles in an outstanding (*egregia*) manner."[62] And Desiderio's familiarity with the goldsmith and bronze sculptor Antonio Pollaiuolo could corroborate this type of activity. In November 1461 Pollaiuolo paid 3 florins at the Mercanzia to settle a debt Desiderio had with the apothecary

Fig. 17
Bernardo and Antonio Rossellino, Desiderio da Settignano
Funerary Monument of the Beata Villana, detail of the curtain-bearing angel, right-hand side
marble, 1451
Santa Maria Novella, Florence

Domenico di Francesco;[63] and a letter written by Baccio Bandinelli named Desiderio, along with Pollaiuolo and Verrocchio, among the "young" collaborators who worked with Lorenzo Ghiberti on the Gates of Paradise.[64]

On the other hand, casting in bronze presupposes the modeling of waxes and an understanding of the properties of clay and the "arts of fire," in other words, skills similar to those required for sculpture in terracotta, a medium in which Desiderio must have worked assiduously and, as the 1461 division of the workshop materials may attest, with excellent results.[65] Such abilities are suggested by the "very beautiful terracotta bust of a Christ" purchased, probably in 1459, by the notary Pierozzo Cerbini, the same man who had drawn up the documents concerning the Magdalen commissioned the previous year by Annalena Malatesta. He believed the bust could be resold at double the price he had paid for it.[66]

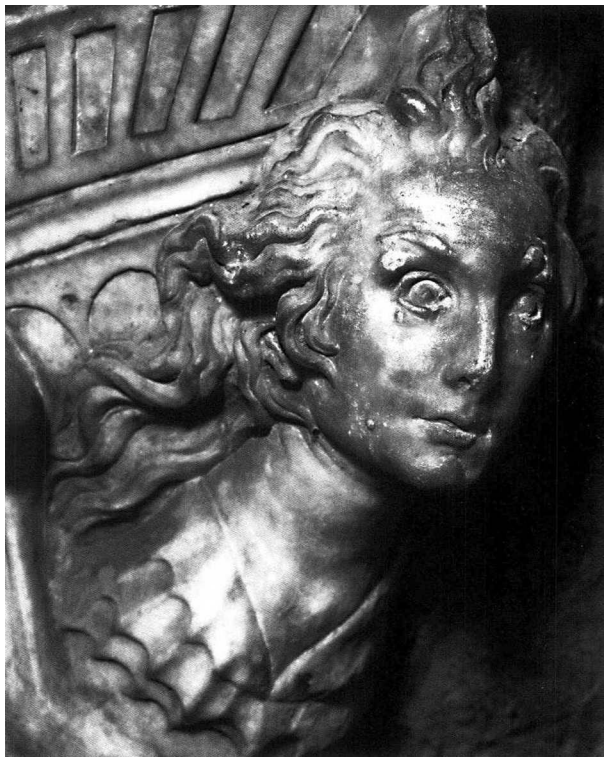

Fig. 18
Desiderio da Settignano, in collaboration with Antonio Rossellino (attributed to)
Lavabo from Palazzo Medici, detail of the harpy on the lower basin, on the right
marble, 1451/53 ca.
San Lorenzo, Florence

Stucco Madonnas Painted by Neri di Bicci

In the workshop of Desiderio and Geri, as in that of practically any Florentine sculptor of the period, from Ghiberti to Donatello and from Antonio Rossellino to Verrocchio, the terms "modeled sculpture" and "painted sculpture" generally referred to reliefs of the Virgin intended for private devotion, serially produced in plaster or sometimes terracotta. These reliefs were cast from plaster molds, usually taken from marble originals, as in the case of the two Madonnas requested in 1462 by Francesco Sforza. Such casts, often intended for a generic market, gained dignity and expressive intensity through elaborate polychromy enhanced with punched gilt decoration, which in both formal and economic terms represented the most demanding and onerous labor. This work was usually entrusted to a specialized painter, such as Neri di Bicci, the owner of a prolific and versatile bottega opposite Desiderio's, or to the Lippesque master known today as Pseudo Pier Francesco Fiorentino. The painter would buy the rough stuccos, paint them, install them in a wooden tabernacle, then resell the entire product.[67]

Our knowledge of this activity is supplied by various accounts by Neri di Bicci in his detailed workshop diary known as the *Ricordanze*, which begins on 10 March 1453. On 4 June 1462, Neri records the sale to Alessandro di Luigi di ser Lamberto, his "neighbor," of a "tabernacle for a [bed]chamber, roughly 2 $^{1}/_{2}$ braccia high, containing a half-length image of Our Lady in plaster in low relief, and Our Lord, nude, who embraces Our Lady, by the hand of Desiderio …, with fine gold decoration on the front and azurite blue where required, all finely decorated and colored." The whole was provided with a rich wooden tabernacle frame *all'antica*, which Neri had made and gilded at his own expense. This relief can be identified as one of the many known replicas of the *Turin Madonna* (1453/55 ca.; cat. 16).[68]

On 19 February 1465, a year after the death of Desiderio, Neri notes that he redecorated the colors and gilding, for Romolo d'Andrea di Nofri, a goldbeater, of a "large tabernacle for a chamber, containing 1 Our Lady made of plaster by the hand of Desiderio with Our Lord, partly swaddled, in her arms." It was probably an example of the *Foulc Madonna*, now in Philadelphia (1458/60 ca.; cat. 19).[69]

In most cases Neri di Bicci unfortunately does not mention the name of the sculptor of the many—more than fifty—plaster Madonnas, which he often describes as being "in low relief" *(di pocho rilievo)*, meaning *stiacciato*, which he "colored" and often set into a "tabernacle for a chamber." These he sometimes sold to Florentine nobles, bankers, rich merchants, notaries, or simple craftsmen, shopkeepers, artists, and monks and nuns between 1454 and 1472. Noteworthy among these are the "haberdasher" *(merciaio)* Mariotto d'Agnolo Mazzi, who bought some 15 (at least 7 of them in 1461 alone), evidently for resale, and the banker Andrea di Biagio, who we know from other sources exported works of art to Rome.[70] But it seems probable that Desiderio's workshop supplied at least the "four Our Ladies in plaster, in low relief, half-length and with their hands joined," which Neri began to paint and frame on 20 March 1459 for the banker Carlo Cambini, who was linked to the art dealer Bartolomeo Serragli, one of Desiderio's most assiduous customers. The unusual iconography recurs in an "Our Lady in plaster, in low relief who adores her Son, in size about 1 braccio" painted in April for Tedaldo della Casa. The dimensions suggest they were casts of the *Alberti Madonna* in the Victoria and Albert Museum (1455 ca.; fig. 112), of which several known stucco versions are decorated with polychromy attributable to Neri di Bicci.[71]

Other Painted Sculptures and the Practice of Drawing

Neri di Bicci's *Ricordanze* shows us the painter preparing to "adorn" with "fine gold" and "azurite blue" a "Virgin Mary of marble by the hand of Desiderio." This work, unfortunately difficult to identify, was installed in a "tabernacle for a chamber" and delivered on 3 January 1461 to the wealthy goldsmith Pietro Tazzi.[72] The collaboration between the two artists thus evidently extended to objects made of stone, and probably also to terracotta and wood. Their well-established relationship, taking in still more types of objects, must have dated back at least to September 1456, when the painter paid "the sculptor Desiderio for an enameled stucco jewel" made "to be placed on the bosom" of a "bust of Saint Catherine of terracotta with an eight-sided base," which he began to "color and gild" in July, completing it in November for "the monk Don Antonio" of San Pancrazio. It was probably a splendid reliquary bust made of terracotta that we can assume was modeled, like its paste jewel, by Desiderio himself, set on a wooden base for which Neri paid Papino di Cerbino.[73]

Two other intriguing *ricordanze* from Neri's book, possibly related to works produced in Desiderio's workshop, deserve attention. On 24 April 1459, Neri di Bicci "painted" and sent back to Francesco, a page for the Signoria in Florence, "a bust of a lady, life-sized, colored, and adorned with fine gold, at our expense except for the blue."[74] Such a work initially brings to mind the problematic, painted, and gilded wooden

bust in the Louvre (1451/53 ca.; cat. 8), but it might also have been a work made of stone, even a low relief, like the *Young Woman* (fig. 16) in Detroit, an equally controversial "Desideriesque" work that has recently been attributed to Geri (1453/55 ca.).[75] An earlier annotation of some significance, made on 14 February 1456, refers to "a head [or bust] in high relief, in sandstone, in size three-quarters of a braccio and $^1/_2$ ... with a gold crown and Roman-style armor surrounded by a fictive frame, with a blue background well colored and decorated." Neri di Bicci used "oil colors" on this work made for a certain Giovanni Sperandio.[76] The material, typology, coloring, and dimensions, similar to those in the *Saint John* in the Bargello (1453/55 ca.; cat. 13), are typical of Desiderio's productions, for instance, the profile *all'antica* of the wreathed *Heroic Youth (Roman Emperor)* in a cuirass and laurel wreath in the Musée Jacquemart-André (1455/57 ca.; fig. 60) and the "heads" of the *12 Caesars* executed in the previous year for Bartolomeo Serragli, 6 of which, as we have seen, were paid for on 23 August through a collaborator of Desiderio's, a certain "Gianni" (Giovanni), whom it is tempting to identify with the aforementioned Giovanni Sperandio. Such reliefs seem to have been a specialty of certain Florentine sculptors trained in his workshop, and perhaps also of his brother Geri for several years, even after Desiderio's death. Such specialization is attested by the large number of profiles *all'antica* in stone that can be attributed to Gregorio di Lorenzo,[77] a fellow assistant of "Gianni." These reliefs soon became a genre appreciated outside the city. They were well suited for export and for a generic market, as is borne out by the arrival in Milan in June 1466 of "4 heads of damsels" made of "painted stone," imported from Florence by Count Giovanni Borromeo.[78]

We cannot rule out the possibility that Desiderio painted his sculptures himself, given that Vasari owned "certain very beautiful pen drawings," probably obtained, like "his portrait, from his relatives in Settignano."[79] These drawings may have been the masterly studies made for Madonnas with the Child and curtain-holding angels in the Uffizi (1460 ca.; fig. 109) and the Getty Museum in Los Angeles (ca. 1452/55).[80] The practice of drawing was widespread among sculptors of the time, in particular among Donatello's "pupils," to whom, according to Gauricus, the master "used to say that he might have taught them the whole art of sculpture with a single word: Draw!"[81]

"Masters" and Desiderio's Training

More information on Desiderio's collaborators and on his own training emerges from an interpretative reading of the Renaissance sources, taking into account the possible reasons for apparent contradictions and errors.

With regard to "masters," it may be observed that in the *Life of Desiderio da Settignano* Vasari does not discuss the sculptor's apprenticeship, but calls him simply "an imitator of the manner of Donatello," for whom "in his youth he made the base of Donatello's *David*." In the second edition of the *Life of Donatello*, however, he lists Desiderio among the master's "disciples," after Rossellino (Bernardo or more probably Antonio, whose beginnings in the profession seem to have much in common with Desiderio's) but before Bertoldo and Bellano, who collaborated with Donatello on his last works, the pulpits

in San Lorenzo (ca. 1461–66): to these pupils and followers Donatello "left the things of his art."[82] We may exclude the hypothesis of a direct apprenticeship, owing to the long period Donatello spent in Padua (1443/44–1454), which coincided with the years when Desiderio would have been trained, and owing to the fact that the latter is not documented among Donatello's many Florentine collaborators in Padua. Thus any relationship between them would have been limited to an early, fleeting period, during the master's brief return to Florence in 1445/46. Besides a clear stylistic and technical dependence of the younger sculptor on the elder, Vasari's account seems to suggest a particular appreciation and a sort of sponsorship of Desiderio on the part of Donatello. Desiderio found a warm welcome among the clients and shops for which the master worked—for example, the Medici and Martelli families, Bartolomeo Serragli, as well as at the worksite of San Lorenzo. And perhaps, as Vasari suggests, Desiderio was hired to complete or even execute the stone works that the aging Donatello, afflicted by "palsy," was no longer able to sculpt himself.[83]

A promising clue to the setting in which the young Desiderio developed his talent and acquired not only specialized skills in working, chiseling, and polishing marble with a "diligence" foreign to the "roughed out" and "unfinished" manner of Donatello,[84] but also a solid architectural background and a more delicate, systematic, and naturalistic decorative sensibility than the eccentric, composite, and flickering character of Donatello's ornament, is presented by the attribution to Desiderio of the funerary monument of the Beata (Blessed) Villana in Santa Maria Novella. That attribution, included in the meager biographical notes in the *Libro di Antonio Billi*, with the peremptory formulation "*fece*" (he made), was repeated by Vasari, who praised his "graceful little angels" and the portrait as though taken "from nature." We know today that the tomb was commissioned, on 12 July 1451, from Bernardo Rossellino, who was supposed to complete it by the end of the year. The monument clearly shows work by various hands, including one (easily recognizable in the flamboyant angel holding a curtain on the right, fig. 17) that differs from the manner of Bernardo and Antonio (seen in the angel's companion on the left), and instead approximates the style of a Desiderio already sensitive to the lessons of Donatello. These factors have long induced experts to consider that the setting for the young sculptor's development must have been the busy workshop of Bernardo Rossellino, with its hegemony in Florence during those years.[85] Here the young Desiderio, distinguished by a more pictorial technique and a more natural and energetic rendition of anatomy and expression, would have collaborated on the Bruni monument in Santa Croce (1446–50 ca.; fig. 49), probably on such decorative sections as the first putto holding a festoon in the frieze of the base. Later,

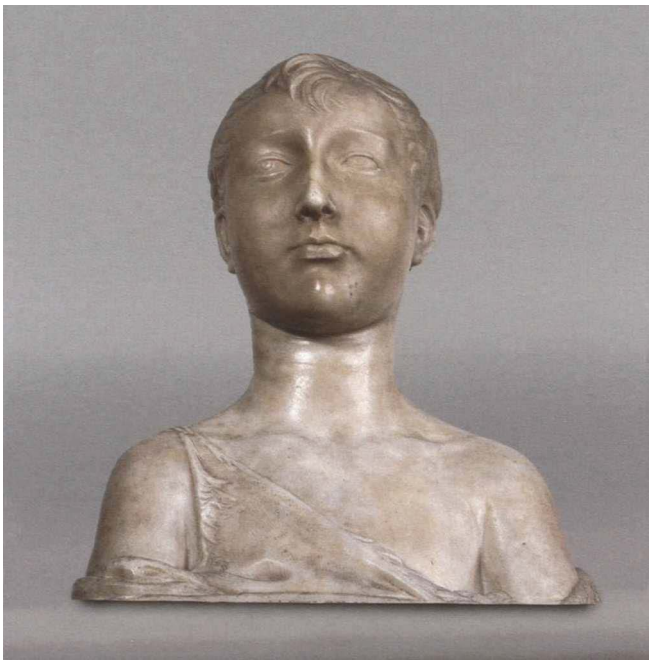

Fig. 19
Desiderio da Settignano?
Young Saint John the Baptist
marble, ca. 1450/52
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. Sculture 91

Fig. 20
Desiderio da Settignano
and assistant
(Matteo Civitali?)
Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini, detail of the adoring angel, in the lunette, left side
marble, ca. 1455–59
Santa Croce, Florence

Fig. 21
Desiderio da Settignano
and assistant
(Domenico Rosselli?)
Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini, detail of the adoring angel, in the lunette, right side
marble, ca. 1455–59
Santa Croce, Florence

on the tabernacle of the Sacrament in Sant'Egidio (1450; fig. 121), he might have had a less marginal role. He may also have worked on the baptismal font in the Collegiata di Empoli (1447), as the playful angel on the left handle suggests. Subsequently, after Bernardo had left for Rome in late 1451, Desiderio may have joined forces with the young Antonio Rossellino, who enrolled in the guild in May 1451. Together they seem to have completed the tomb of the Beata Villana and executed the Medici lavabo in the Old Sacristy (1451/53 ca.; fig. 18), as well as reliefs and busts for domestic use, such as the *Young Saint John* in the Bargello traditionally attributed to Rossellino (1450/52; fig. 19).[86]

Fig. 22
Desiderio da Settignano and assistant (Benedetto da Maiano?)
Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini, detail of the head of the garland-bearing angel on the right
marble, ca. 1455–59
Santa Croce, Florence

Collaborators and "Pupils"

The *Libro di Antonio Billi* also suggests that, for especially demanding projects, Desiderio occasionally employed young collaborators of quite a different caliber from the assistants mentioned in the documents, such as Gregorio di Lorenzo, "Gianni," and Pasquino da Montepulciano. These young artists were destined to fill the gap left in the art world of Florence by the early and unexpected death of Desiderio, that extraordinary "spirit," who was buried on 16 January 1464.[87] The anonymous biographer in fact declares that Andrea del Verrocchio "made" the "figure of Our Lady above the tomb of Messer Carlo from Arezzo, in marble, in Santa Croce," that is, the large *stiacciato* tondo in the lunette of Desiderio's Marsuppini monument (fig. 24), "which he [Verrocchio] worked while still very young" according to Vasari. In a perhaps understandable slip, however, Vasari transfers this reference to the earlier Bruni monument, designed and built by Bernardo Rossellino,[88] and thus vitiates its relevance.

While it seems difficult to find stylistic reasons to question Desiderio's authorship of the Madonna, which is the visual fulcrum of the Marsuppini monument, the question of autograph work on the accessory figures at the summit is a very different matter.[89] With the date planned for the solemn unveiling of the work (24 June 1459, Saint John's Day) approaching, Desiderio had greater motivation and freedom to employ other collaborators, including some from outside the workshop, just as Bernardo Rossellino had done in enlisting Buggiano to work on the Bruni monument across the nave. It has often been observed that the adoring angel on the left side of the lunette (fig. 20) is characterized by a formal and technical autonomy so far removed from Desiderio's style as to exclude even an attribution to his brother Geri;[90] the style may instead even suggest the young sculptor from Lucca, Matteo Civitali (1436–1501), who was present in Florence between 1457/58 and 1465.[91] The name of Verrocchio has likewise been proposed for the more Desideriesque angel on the right (fig. 21);[92] the more timid, composed, and predictable style of that figure rather suggests the hand of Domenico Rosselli (1439–1497/98),[93] whose independent activity from 1460 onward is intertwined with that of two other masters related to him in training and perhaps origins: Gregorio di Lorenzo and Francesco di Simone Ferrucci (1437–93).[94]

A more convincing recent proposal credits Verrocchio with the festoon-bearing angel to the viewer's left on the cornice of the trabeation of the Marsuppini monument (fig. 23).[95] It has a full and smiling face, lively eyes sharply outlined and unusually

elongated toward the bridge of the nose, and hair curled in short, spiraling locks, just as in the youthful statues by that artist who, trained as a goldsmith, must have practiced sculpture between 1457 and 1461. By the latter year, as has been remarked, he was an independent master, in a position to compete with Desiderio and, as of 1464, ready to take his place at San Lorenzo and in the favor of the Medici circle.[96] The corresponding angel on the right (fig. 22), with regular features, a comparatively dull expression, and minutely drilled locks of hair, may suggest the hand of a very young Benedetto da Maiano, the sculptor who, as has been seen, was supposed to have completed works that remained unfinished on Desiderio's death.

A last, picturesque passage, found in Vasari's *Life of Mino da Fiesole*, which immediately follows that of Desiderio, shows Mino as a boy "placed in the stonecutting workshop of Desiderio da Settignano, a youth very talented in sculpture," and intent on "making terracotta

Fig. 23
Desiderio da Settignano and assistant (Andrea del Verrocchio?)
Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini, detail of the head of the garland-bearing angel on the left
marble, ca. 1455–59
Santa Croce, Florence

versions of things that Desiderio had made in marble. They proved so similar that he [Desiderio], seeing him determined to do well in that art, urged him on and set him to work on his own things in marble."[97] Desiderio was no longer the solitary, preoccupied sculptor described a few pages before, but a considerate master who "took infinite satisfaction" in seeing the rapid progress of his pupil and with "loving kindness continually taught him to avoid the errors that can be made in that art." This is probably another myth conceived to represent Desiderio as a model of grace, kindness, and virtue; Mino da Fiesole (1429–84) was in fact the same age as Desiderio and no less precocious, such that in 1453, when Desiderio joined the artists' guild, Mino was already one of the favorite sculptors of the Medici and known beyond the confines of the city.[98] But if it is a myth, it is perhaps a more human and truer one, which may encourage us to continue peering into the shadows of an old workshop near Santa Trinita, picking up its marbles and stones in search of traces of the masters, assistants, and pupils who contributed to the greatness and fecundity of Desiderio's art.[99]

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1. *"Cielo," "natura," "grazia grandissima," "dono veramente celeste," "senza fatiche," "istudio,""imitatore della maniera di Donato,"* Vasari 1550 and 1568, ed. 1966–84, III, 1971, pp. 398–403. On the personality of Desiderio that emerges from Vasari's biography, see the essay by Gaborit in this catalogue (cat.); for a reflection on his activity though the art literature of the Renaissance, compared with the work of Donatello and Antonio Rossellino, and on "grace" as an attribute, see Gentilini 2002, and note 4 here.

2. Benivieni (1464), ed. 1949, p. 32, in Pfisterer 2002, p. 496. See also the early appreciation of Filarete (1464) below.

3. Verino (1488 ca.), ed. 1790, I, p. 134, in Pfisterer 2002, p. 503.

4. *"Se morte molto immature non lo rapiva," "arebbe venuto ad somma perfectione,"* Landino (1481), in Baxandall 1978, p. 148, for whom Desiderio was the artist "of utmost grace" *(di somma gratia)*. See also Verino (1488 ca.) in Gilbert 1988, p. 214; *Libro di Antonio Billi* (1506–30 ca.), ed. 1991, pp. 55–56 (a biography reproduced with minimal variations around 1540 in the *Codice Magliabecchiano*, which it will thus be unnecessary to cite here); Vasari 1550 and 1568 states that "he would have outshone in art all those that he had surpassed in grace" *(vinto avrebbe d'arte tutti coloro che di grazia aveva superati)*. In other words, Donatello himself was deficient in the very quality considered indispensable to the "modern manner" (1568, ed. 1878–85, IV, 1880, pp. 9–11; see note 1).

5. *"El vago Desyder si dolce e bello,"* Santi (1482 ca.), in Bek 1969, p. 148. This is how the renowned and lamented personality of Desiderio must have seemed in the "infinite epigrams and sonnets" attached "for a very long time" to the tomb of Desiderio, a "most graceful" *(venustiss)* sculptor, as suggested by the two poems cited by Vasari in the Torrentine edition of the *Lives* (1550), who died of unknown causes on 16 January 1464 and was buried in San Pier Maggiore.

6. *"Fatica di corpo," "gran sudore composto di polvere e convertito in fango," "essercizio meccanichissimo,"* Leonardo da Vinci (1490 ca.–1517), ed. (1971) 1977–79, III, 1978, p. 478.

7. *"Teste di putti,""di femine che ridono,"* Vasari 1568, ed. 1878–85, IV, 1880, p. 19. See Parronchi 1989; Markham Schulz 1992, p. 389; Gentilini 2002, p. 170, with regard to Desiderio's relief of *Saint Jerome in the Desert* in Washington (cat. 15), which seems to anticipate Leonardo's reflections on the *paragone* (comparison of the arts) and prove how sculpture is able to express the atmospheric effects attempted in Leonardo's painting. See Gentilini 2003 for the way Donatello's and Desiderio's sculptures gave rise to the expression of laughter in Leonardo's early painting.

8. *"Me e dicto dachi el manegia tutto el dì che fa adasio,"* (I have been told by those who are with him all day that he is a slow worker"); thus Nicodemo Tranchedini, Francesco Sforza's agent in Florence, explained Desiderio's reluctance to accept a commission in February 1462 (Spencer 1968, pp. 131–33, doc. p. 133; see following).

9. *"Molto puliva le cose sue,""delicate e vezzozi,"* Landino (1481); *Libro di Antonio Billi* (1506–30 ca.).

10. See the essay by Baldinotti in this cat., pp. 103–9; Gentilini 1985.

11. For documents on the life and activity of Desiderio, see, unless otherwise indicated, Kennedy 1930. The text that follows, contributions to which are indicated in the notes, presupposes the basic bibliography on the sculptor, in particular the monograph by Cardellini 1962-1; the review by Markham 1964; and the biographic works by Markham Schulz 1992 and Elsen 2000. It has not been possible for me to consult the unpublished doctorate thesis by A.V. Coonin, *The Sculptures of Desiderio da Settignano*, Rutgers University 1995 (Coonin 1995-3).

12. *"Lavorati di continovo da scarpellini e scultori che nascono in quel luogo," "gli scarpelli e 'l mazzuolo [col] latte [materno],"* Vasari 1568, ed. 1878-1885, VII, 1881, p. 137.

13. Markham Schulz 1977.

14. *"Una bottegha d'arte d'iscarpellatori al ponte a Santa Trinita""un chasolare"* Darr, Preyer 1999, p. 729, doc. p. 731.

15. *"di lavori fatti che ssono nostri circha a lire cento," "facciano un pocho d'articella di lastraiuolo""in merchatantie et debitori la valuta di fiorini 30."* See also Darr, Preyer 1999, pp. 728–29, doc. p. 731.

16. *"Scultor populi Sancte Maria a Settignano,"* Waldman 2000, doc. p. 18 note 1.

17. Corti, Hartt 1962, pp. 157–58, 163–66, docs. 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21. See Middeldorf 1979; Caglioti in this cat.

18. *"Gianni, sta cho'lui," "Chiricho di Lorenzo," "Ghiroghoro, sta cho'lui"*; Pisani 2002; Caglioti 2004, pp. 59–60, passim; Bellandi 1997/98, who first associated the master with Gregorio in exh. cat. New York, 2001, p. 392. Probably Gregorio di Lorenzo left Desiderio's workshop in 1461, the year he became a member of the *arte*. Also indubitable is his contribution to certain smiling cherubim in the marble bases in the Bargello, perhaps executed around 1455 to Donatello's design in Desiderio's workshop, as seen in the spirited angels' heads with half-open mouths and flamelike hair intended for a large aedicule to be erected in the presbytery area in San Lorenzo (figs. 7, 9; Gentilini in exh. cat. Florence, 1985, pp. 286–97; Morolli in exh. cat. Florence, 2006, pp. 323–25, no. 128); his hand is recognized again in the frieze with seraphim and cornucopia in the trabeation in the tabernacle of the Sacrament, also in San Lorenzo, sculpted around 1458/60.

19. Darr, Preyer 1999, pp. 728–30, doc. p. 731.

20. *"Solenne maestro,""intagliatore di marmi e di pietre"*; Filarete (1464), ed. 1972, pp. 170, 258, 284, 391.

21. *"Belle ... de gesso ornate de oro, et colorite ... de marmoro, ... de pietra cotta ...materia, ... qual se volesse purche fosse cosa degna" "obligato ancora per un buon pezzo ad certi lavori qui in San Lorenzo"*; Spencer 1968, pp. 131–33, docs. pp. 132–33; see note 8.

22. *"grazia," "leggiadria," "affetti," "teste di femmine e di fanciulli"; "ritrasse di naturale la testa della Marietta degli Strozzi, la quale essendo bellissima gli riuscì molto eccellente"*; see Negri Arnoldi 1967; Strom 1983; Coonin 1995; see also Bormand and Luchs in this cat., the introductions and related entries on busts of adults (pp. 128–59) and children (pp. 160–75).

23. See pp. 196–217.

24. See Avery 1976; Strom 1982; Scalini 1994–95; Negri Arnoldi 2003; and in this cat., Gentilini, pp. 196–99, and Mozzati, pp. 200–217.

25. *"una testa di marmo di tutto rilievo, di mano di Desiderio,""una storia di fauni e altre figure di mano di Desiderio,""due teste che ridono sopra l'aquaio [della] sala grande terrena." Libro d'Inventario dei Beni di Lorenzo il Magnifico* (copy of 1512), ed. 1992, pp. 79, 80, 134. The lost "story of fauns" seems an important forerunner of similar compositions during the age of Lorenzo de' Medici, and recalls the "marble in the form of a frieze" depicting the "Abduction by the Centaurs by the hand of Donatello." This was described by Bocchi (1591, ed. 1677, pp. 362–64) in the house of Baccio Valori, where at least three other Desideriesque reliefs were thought at that time to be by Donatello (see Gentilini 2005, pp. 478, 490–91 note 29): the *Julius Caesar* in the Louvre (cat. 14), the stone profile of a woman in the Detroit Institute of Arts, attributed to Geri (fig. 16), and the *Panciatichi Madonna* in which the hand of Desiderio was already recognized (cat. 20).

26. *"Fanciullo di marmo tondo,""levato in su l'altare, per cosa mirabile,"* Vasari 1550 and 1568; previously referred to as "admirable" in the *Libro di Antonio Billi* (1506–1530 ca.), and ascribed to Desiderio in Albertini's *Memoriale* of 1510. See Parronchi 1965; Verdier 1983; Beck 1984; Gaborit 1987; Butterfield, Elam, Coonin 1999; and in this cat. pp. 236–52.

27. Vasari 1550 and 1568 suggests that Desiderio contributed, completing, with elaborate marble elements, a simpler structure of a different material that had already been made or was under construction: perhaps an aedicule in the form of a temple, or a proper "chapel" of the type seen in Santa Maria in Impruneta, with an altar table made of *pietra serena*.

28. *"La tavola marmorea del Sacramento con i suoi ornamenti"*; Albertini 1510; *Libro di Antonio Billi* (1506–1530 ca.). See the entry on the tabernacle of the Sacrament (cat. 23), datable to between 1457 ca. and 1 August 1461, when it was "completely embedded in the wall *(murato interamente)*. Scalini 1994–1995 believes part of the lost door in the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo* to be a small round marble *stiacciato* relief of the Madonna and Child, today in a private collection, attributable to Desiderio, or alternatively to Antonio Rossellino, around 1460.

29. *"tabernacolo...sopra una colonna ...una Nostra Donna piccola, di leggiadra e graziata maniera, onde l'una e l'altra cosa è in grandissima stima e in bonissimo pregio"*; Vasari 1550 and 1568. Described in the 18th century as "a bust [or fragment? *busto*]" originally placed "above a small column in the apothecary's shop," damaged by the flood of 1557. It does not seem to have any relation to the *Madonna delle Murate*, a recent copy of the *Madonna del Perdono* by Donatello, as Bonsanti 1989 proposes.

30. *"fogliami ...tenuti cosa bellissima ...allora scoperte molte antichità ...piumose ...più viva che se d'osso proprio fosse, ...ritratto di naturale... somma bontà e d'artifizio ..., lavorato secondo la maniera di Donato ... con giudizio e con grazia mirabilissima,... fanciulli... condotti con maniera bella e vivace,"* Vasari 1550 and 1568; formerly referred to Desiderio by Albertini 1510, and in the *Libro di Antonio Billi* (1506–1530 ca.). See cat. 1 on the *Funerary Monument to Carlo Marsuppini* (died 24 April 1453), probably completed in summer 1459 when an appropriate epitaph was sought for the sarcophagus.

31. Gentilini 1994-2; Caglioti 2000.

32. See in this cat. pp. 218–21. The terms "delicate and charming" *(dilicato et vezzoso)* used by Landino to describe the art of Desiderio are associated with "decoration" *(ornato)*: see Baxandall 1978, pp. 121–24, 136–37, 148.

33. *"Ancora che in quello non siano figure, e' vi si vede però una bella maniera ed una grazia infinita nell'altre cose sue"*; Vasari 1550 and 1568; formerly assigned to Desiderio by Albertini 1510.

34. *".... ciborio bellissimo ... casamento, in otto faccie scompartito"*: Bocchi 1591, ed. 1677, pp. 356–57.

35. Middeldorf 1976, pp. 16–19; Gentilini 1994-1, p. 192.

36. *"Disegno [per la] costruzione"... "maestri idonei"*; Fumi 1891, p. 427, doc. p. 433.

37. *"Basamento ... nel quale Desiderio fece di marmo alcune Arpie bellissime, .et alcuni viticci di bronzo molto graziosi e bene intesi"*; Vasari 1550 and 1568. See Caglioti 2000, pp. 101–52; Passavant 1981 connects it, without evidence, to the modified Medici lavabo in the Old Sacristy in San Lorenzo, of which at least the right side can be attributed to Desiderio (fig. 18). The lavabo is perhaps a result of his collaboration with Antonio Rossellino around 1451/53 (Gentilini 1994-1, pp. 287–88).

38. Bellandi 1997; Darr, Preyer 1999; and in this cat. pp. 218–21.

39. *"Per fare due finestrette sopra lo palcho della logia [nella] chasa da signore"*; Ginori Conti 1938, doc. p. 294.

40. *"Nella facciata della casa de' Gianfigliazzi, un'arme grande con un lione, bellissima"* Vasari 1550 and 1568; formerly referred to Desiderio in the *Libro di Antonio Billi* (1506–1530 ca.). See Franci 1995, pp. 20–21; Bellandi 1997, p. 33; Darr, Preyer 1999, pp. 729–30. Difficult to read today and considered by some a 19th-century reconstruction, it is well reproduced by Bode 1892–1905, VII, 1892, pl. 301.

41. *"Altre cose di pietra, altre arme"*; Vasari 1550 and 1568; *Libro di Antonio Billi* (1506–1530 ca.).

42. Darr, Preyer 1999, pp. 729–30; in this cat. pp. 218–21.

43. *"tutte le pietre conce e non conce, dentro e fuori di detta casa"*; doc. in Ginori Lisci 1972, p. 804.

44. *"bellissima"*; Darr, Preyer 1999; Darr, Barnet, Boström 2002, cat. 54, pp. 100–104.

45. Beck 1984, doc. p. 212. See Civai 1989; Darr, Preyer 1999, pp. 724–25; Paolozzi Strozzi in this cat. on pp. 61–73 and cat. 2.

46. Morolli, in exh. cat. Florence, 2006, n. 128, pp. 323–25.

47. *"In chasa nostra ... più chose di scholtura e di pitura di tarsie e connessi, di mano de' migliori maestri che siano stati da buono tempo in qua, non tanto in Firenze ma in Italia ..."*; Rucellai (1457-1480 ca.), ed. 1960–1981.

48. Quinterio, in exh. cat. Florence, 2006, no. 77, pp. 207–8.

49. *"maestri de scharpello,""schultore e pittore"*; Rucellai (1457–1480 ca.), ed. 1960–81, pp. 23–24.

50. Albertini 1510, p. 10.

51. Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 125–43.

52. See note 51 for the different attributions proposed, including to Donatello (Cinelli 1678) and Antonio Rossellino (Becherucci 1932).

53. *"Non si dà mai al legno quella carnosità o morbidezza, che al metallo ed al marmo, ed all'altre sculture che noi veggiamo o di stucchi o di cera o di terra."* Vasari 1568, ed. 1878–85, I, 1878, p. 167.

54. *"Agnolo di legno ... bella quanto più dir si possa, [che Desiderio] lasciò abbozzata ... fu poi finite da Benedetto da Maiano."* This is repeated in Vasari's *Life of Benedetto da Maiano*; Albertini 1510 says the Magdalen was "begun by Desiderio" *(inconminciata per Desiderio)*.

55. As remarked by Coonin 1995-2.

56. Coonin 1995-2, docs. p. 799.

57. Waldman 2000, docs. p. 17.

58. Coonin 1995-2, docs. pp. 792 note 4, 799; on p. 792 he suggests a collaboration between the two artists, based on their complementary skills.

59. Ceriana in exh. cat. Urbino, 2005, pp. 175–80, underlining similarities to the head of a woman on the *Boni Fireplace* (fig. 12), attributed to Geri, whose name is thus perhaps more pertinent for the bust in Berlin.

60. Caglioti 2000, pp. 101–52, does not suggest this possibility, even though he believes the base was completed in 1459 and is inclined to imagine a collaboration between Desiderio and Pasquino da Montepulciano (who would then have reused the harpies from the Medici base on the Prato Pulpit).

61. Beck 1984, p. 212, suspects there were close and lasting links between Desiderio and Ghiberti but does not offer any hypothesis.

62. Gaurico (1504, ed.) 1999, p. 253, but mistakenly crediting him with the bronze door of the Castel Nuovo in Naples.

63. Beck 1984, doc. p. 213, is inclined to propose a collaboration between the two artists. But Cellini, in the introduction to his *Treatise on Goldsmithing*, records Desiderio as having been apprenticed as a goldsmith.

64. Bandinelli (1550 ca.), in Bottari 1754–73, ed. 1822–25, I, pp. 104–5.

65. Gentilini 2004, for an important painted terracotta statue of the *Madonna and Child Enthroned* (fig. 15) venerated, perhaps from the beginning, in Santa Maria della Misericordia in Correggio, ascribed to Desiderio around 1452/53 (today only the upper section of the Virgin remains).

66. *"Testa d'uno Christo di terra chotta bellissimo,"* Coonin 1995, doc. p. 799.

67. Middeldorf 1978; Strom 1982; Gentilini 1993; in this cat. pp. 196–217.

68. *"[Un]cholmo da chamera grande di braccia 2 ½ incircha alto, drentovi una ½ Nostra Donna di gesso di pocho rilievo e Nostro Signore che abbraccia Nostra Donna ignudo, di mano di Disidero. . . messa d'oro fine dinanzi e d'azuro di Magna dove achade e tutta bene ornata e cholorita...al'anticha."* Neri di Bicci (1453–75), ed. 1976, p. 186 doc. 369. See cats. 16, 17.

69. Neri di Bicci 1976, p. 239 doc. 465. See cat. no. 19, *"cholmo da chamera grande, drentovi 1 Nostra Donna di gesso di mano di Disidero cho Nostro Signiore in chollo ch'è mezo fasciato."*

70. Neri di Bicci 1976, *ad indicem*, in part, p. 174 doc. 343. See Esch 1978; Gentilini 1993, p. 20.

71. *"quatro Nostre Donne di gesso di pocho rilievo, le quali sono meze e stanno cholle mani giunte"; "Nostra Donna di gesso di pocho rilievo che adora il Figliuolo, di grandezza di braccio 1 incircha"*; Neri di Bicci (1453–1475), ed. 1976, p. 109 doc. 212, pp. 111–12 doc. 217. See Tartuferi 1991, pp. 87–90 for two examples painted by Neri di Bicci (Pinacoteca di Ancona; private collection), who was also responsible for several pictorial copies of this same composition (New Haven, Yale University; Dijon, Musée des Beaux Arts).

72. *"Ornare [con] oro fine [e] azuro di Magna [una] Vergine Maria di marmo di mano di Disidero... tabernacholo da tenere in chamera"*; Neri di Bicci (1453–75), ed. 1976, pp. 156–57 doc. 308, pp. 219–20 doc. 432.

73. *"Disiderio intagliatore per uno ismalto di stucho...per pore al petto"* of a *"testa di Santa Chaterina di tera chon una basa a 8 facce [iniziata a] cholorire e mettere d'oro..."* for *"don Antonio monacho di San Pancrazio."* Neri di Bicci 1976, p. 59 doc. 118, p. 60 doc. 119.

74. *"[Neri di Bicci] dipinse... donzello de' Signori ... una testa di dama grande chome naturale cholorita e ornata d'oro fine a nostre ispesa acetto che d'azuro."* Neri di Bicci 1976, p. 113 doc. 221.

75. Darr, Preyer 1999, pp. 730–31; and in this cat. pp. 176–79.

76. *"Una testa di mezo rilievo di macignio grande di tre quarti di braccio e ½ . . . chon una chorona d'oro e armadura alla romana e d'atorno chornice chontrafatta, el champo azuro e bene cholorita e ornata,... cholori a olio."* Neri di Bicci 1976, pp. 68–69, doc. 136.

77. Pisani 2001-2; Caglioti in this cat. on pp. 87–101.

78. Biscaro 1914, doc. p. 90, *"4 teste de damigelle [di] preda depinte [fatte] venire da Firenze."*

79. But the identification with "Desiderio di Bartolomeo, painter" recorded in a document of 1437 published by Waldman 2000, p. 18 note 1, is untenable, for reasons including the chronology.

80. Goldner 1989; Angelini, in exh. cat. Florence, 1986-3, pp. 54–55, nos. 35, 36, reaffirms Desiderio's authorship of the sheet in the Uffizi, which Goldner had ascribed to Antonio Rossellino.

81. *"Allievi .... era solito dire che avrebbe insegnato loro tutta l'arte della scultura con una sola parola: Disegnate!"* Gaurico 1504, ed. 1999, pp. 149–51. See Gentilini 2002, pp. 157–58.

82. *"Imitatore della maniera di Donato... fece nella sua giovanezza il basamento del David ... suoi discepoli... lasciò le cose dell'arte,"* Vasari 1568, ed. 1966–87, III, 1971, p. 223.

83. Darr, Preyer 1999, pp. 724–25; Paolozzi Strozzi in this cat. on pp. 61–73 and cat. 2.

84. *"Diligenza ... bozzata [e] non finita [di Donatello]"*; Vasari 1550 and 1568, ed. 1966–87, III, 1971, passim. See Gentilini 2002, pp. 164–69.

85. Becherucci 1932; Markham Schulz 1963; 1977, passim, which attributes to Desiderio only the effigy, and assigns the angels to two of Bernardo's assistants. The hypothesis of collaboration with Rossellino is today largely accepted even by those who do not exclude earlier training with Donatello, like Poeschke 1990, ed. 1993, p. 424; but not by Pope-Hennessy 1996, pp. 371, 375, 376.

86. The suggestion here modifies and integrates the proposals made by Markham Schulz (see note 85).

87. Vasari effectively emphasizes the perturbation caused by Desiderio's death, leaving art lovers "more than stunned by such a loss" (*più che storditi per tanta perdita*).

88. *"La quale lavorò essendo ancora assai giovane"*; Vasari 1550 and 1568, ed. 1966–87, III, 1971. p. 535; an evident error in the first edition of the *Lives*, in which he wrote "M. Carlo Bruni Aretino."

89. Weeks 1999 reports that studies on the use of tools have revealed the participation of at least four different hands, and confirms the *Madonna* is in fact by Desiderio; Pope-Hennessy 1996, pp. 377–78; Markham Schulz 1992, p. 388, considers the entire monument to be "largely the work of assistants."

90. Cardellini 1962-1, p. 44.

91. See Caglioti 2004, pp. 50–53, passim, who emphasizes the relationship of Civitali with Gregorio di Lorenzo, ascribing to Civitali the *Donaldson Noblewoman* in the Louvre (inv. RF 935; fig. 86), previously attributed to Desiderio.

92. Middeldorf 1937–40.

93. See Pisani 2001-1, 35, who is however inclined to see debts to Rossellino. Among the Desideriesque works that can be assigned to Rosselli, I will mention here only the lovely Virgin and Child in a perspectival setting in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Negri Arnoldi 2003, p. 63).

94. See Parmiggiani 2004. The derivations from the Marsuppini monument and other works by Desiderio in Ferrucci's oeuvre are so numerous and specific as to suggest that he must have spent a long time in Desiderio's workshop and perhaps obtained drawings and casts. I believe Domenico Rosselli and Francesco di Simone collaborated with Gregorio di Lorenzo (see note 18), also on the tabernacle of the Sacrament in San Lorenzo (1457 ca.–61) and that around 1458/60 they carved the seraphim in the arch and the candelabra on either side of the Pietà.

95. Covi 2005, pp. 23–28.

96. Middeldorf 1976, pp. 20–21, has already ascribed to Verrocchio the Kress noblewoman in the National Gallery of Art, Washington (1939.1.326), traditionally attributed to Desiderio; numerous other works may be due for similar changes of attribution.

97. *"Posto all'arte dello squadrar le pietre con Desiderio da Settignano, giovane eccellente nella scultura ... far di terra dalle cose che aveva fatte di marmo Desiderio, sì simili che egli, vedendolo vòlto a far profitto in quell'arte, lo tirò innanzi e lo messe a lavorar di marmo sopra le cose sue,"* Vasari 1550 and 1568, ed. 1966–84, III, 1971, p. 535.

98. *"Sodisfaceva infinitamente .... amorevolezza continuamente gli insegnava a guardarsi dagl'errori che si possono fare in quell'arte."* According to Caglioti 1991, pp. 50–53, Mino was also trained in Bernardo Rossellino's workshop.

99. The reader is referred to the study conference on Desiderio da Settignano, planned to coincide with the Florence exhibition, at which, in addition to stylistic and historical arguments to support the hypotheses advanced here, other proposals on attributions will be made.

DESIDERIO: STYLE ASPIRING TO GRACE

Marc Bormand

In about 1450, when Desiderio joined the guild of stone and wood carvers, the transition from the International Gothic[1] to the art of the early Renaissance was largely effected in Florence. We know that sculpture played a fundamental role in this shift, as seen in the stone of the city's principal facades: the Duomo, the Baptistery, Orsanmichele. On all of them the work of Lorenzo Ghiberti, Nanni di Banco, and Donatello was to be seen. Although Donatello executed a major commission in the 1430s for an exterior work in the Mercato Vecchio, the *Dovizia*, the most important commissions received in the following years, whether public or private, were for works designed to be placed and seen indoors, in a religious or secular setting. It has often been repeated that the emergence of Desiderio's work coincides with the departure of Donatello for Padua (January 1444), a date that also supposedly marks a general stylistic shift in Florentine sculpture. This break, however, merits a more nuanced approach. Donatello's work of the 1430s and early 1440s is undoubtedly marked, in some of his pieces, by an exploration of expression, though one that is rarely overstated. But, it stems from a desire to convey emotions ranging from unrestrained gaiety (as in the *spiritelli* of the cantoria in the Musée Jacquemart-André or the *Amorino-Atys* in the Bargello) and amusement (as in the *spiritelli* in the Cavalcanti Annunciation in Santa Croce) to reserved gravitas (as in the Virgin in the Cavalcanti Annunciation). Donatello's work in these decades is also characterized by a marked interest in the rendering of the human body in movement as well as in the expression of its weight—both of which result in an expansion in the spatial density of the figures—visible in the cantoria and its procession of playing and dancing *spiritelli*, and in the *Dovizia*, the first large public allegorical statue to be created since Roman antiquity.

However, Desiderio's art cannot be understood without also taking into account the work of Luca della Robbia: not so much for Luca's strict interpretation of form, a legacy of Lorenzo Ghiberti, as for the perception of the role of light, which, reflected brightly on the surface of the white enameled terracotta sculpture, is partly responsible for its evanescent quality. The denial of the weight of the material, and the role given to reflected light are without a doubt amongst the most important of Desiderio's contributions to the art of marble sculpture. Through this work on luminosity, which belies the hard and heavy nature of the material, Desiderio opened new perspectives that were only fully explored at the end of the 19th century and completely transformed during the course of the 20th century with the emergence of light as a medium in its own right.

Fig. 24
Desiderio da Settignano and assistants
Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini, detail of tondo with the Virgin and Child
marble, ca. 1455–59
Santa Croce, Florence

Fig. 25
Desiderio da Settignano and assistants (Matteo Civitali?)
Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini, detail of left-hand angel
marble, ca. 1455–59
Santa Croce, Florence

Among the many descriptions of Desiderio's art, one written in 1481 by Cristoforo Landino—"The very great Desiderio, delicate and charming and of the utmost grace" (*Desiderio grandissimo et delicato et vezoso e di somma gratia*)[2]—perfectly expresses the stylistic traits usually attributed to his œuvre; delicacy, grace, charm, all of which recur in many of the artist's works.

In two similar motifs, the tondi of the Virgin and standing Child on the tombs of Leonardo Bruni and of Carlo Marsuppini (fig. 24), the same scene creates two different impressions. In the relief by Bernardo Rossellino, the treatment of the drapery firmly molding the two bodies enhances the somewhat hieratic nature of the figures. The liveliness and lightness of the fabrics in Desiderio's work, on the other hand, echo a scene in which the faces of the two smiling figures are illuminated by a joy that tends to be externalized and that is also manifested by the expressive, broad, open gestures.

This capacity to render the diversity of sentiments is clearly evident in the various busts of children produced by Desiderio. The whole-hearted laughter of the Vienna child (cat. 9) expresses something unique for a work produced in the round. This childlike joy, however, already appears in the friezes made by Donatello and Michelozzo for the Pulpit of the Holy Cintola (the Virgin Mary's belt) in Prato and for the panels of the cantoria by Donatello in Florence. But the often exaggerated theatrical tendencies in Donatello—his preference for a showy comic depiction, or, in the case of the *Amorino-Atys* (Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello; fig. 26), sheer glee—give way to a light gaiety. This graceful playfulness recurs in the broad smile of the Child in the tondo of the *Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini* (cat. 1), and in the more intimate *Foulc Madonna* (cat. 19). In the second case, the extremely light treatment of the hair reinforces the graceful character of the young Child.

Fig. 26
Donatello
Amorino-Atys, detail
bronze with traces of gilding
ca. 1440
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. Bronzi 448

The theme of the young infant enabled Desiderio to play with a whole range of sentiments, and it is doubtless not a coincidence that this subject was one of those most commonly tackled by the artist in different forms: as part of a group of the Virgin and Child, as independent busts of children (perhaps secular but more probably religious, of the Infant Christ or the young John the Baptist), as angels bearing heraldic shields or supporting candles around funerary or sacred monuments. The Washington busts of children (cats. 10 and 11) embody Desiderio's capacity to capture the transitory nature of a nascent smile. This art of the nuance is served by an ability to render

the softness of the modeling around the lips, the dimples, and curves of a still immature face. We find these sentiments once again in the terracotta bust from the Musée Jacquemart-André (fig. 31). A real contrast in character can be detected in the two angels bearing heraldic shields that flank the Carlo Marsuppini funerary monument. The two young boys convey very different emotions: the full smile of the left-hand angel (fig. 25 and ill. pp. 120 and 121) accords with his animated and slightly tilted pose and contrasts with the more serious (thoughtful) character of his companion, shown in a pose conveying a greater sense of stability.

Desiderio's favorite subjects included not only small children but also adolescents. Here, too, Donatello paved the way. The smooth, determined figure of his *David* in the Duomo,[3] and the face "depicting a still childlike sensibility" of his *Saint Louis de Toulouse*, visible to all in the Guelph Party's niche in Orsanmichele,[4] constitute two important examples of a quest for expression in the early quattrocento. Desiderio depicted this adolescent, or even pre-adolescent, figure in a specific manner, bearing in mind that it represented one of the most important figures for the city of Florence: its patron saint, John the Baptist. In both pose and overall handling, the young Baptist in the *Arconati Visconti Tondo* (cat. 12) and the same figure in the Bargello relief (cat. 13) share numerous characteristics: for example, a slightly incomplete profile, which enables the second eye to be just detected, and a head of tangled curls. But the fine carving of the marble, its golden color (probably lighter originally), and the softness of the modeling of the face reveal a somewhat dreamy figure. The slightly sharper cutting of the *pietra serena* and its dark color, the thinness of the arm, and the absence of iris in the eye accentuate the melancholic appearance of the youthful subject. His expression, which was no doubt considerably different when the work was still covered with its original polychromy, is also served by a profound sensibility in the treatment of the flesh on the neck and shifting appearance of the garment, recently highlighted when the work was cleaned.

At a slightly older age, these types reappear in two very different subjects, a John the Baptist, again, and also a youthful hero (sometimes considered as a Roman emperor); they are found in three works: a life-size figure in the round for the *Martelli Saint John the Baptist* (cat. 2 and fig. 42), a bust in the round for the *Goupil Saint John the Baptist* (cat. 3), and a relief for the bust of a *Heroic Youth* (Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André, inv. 1806, fig. 60). For the latter, in place of what we might expect in an image of an ancient Roman warrior, namely a dignified and righteous figure, a model of *virtù*, Desiderio turned once more to the representation of a man barely out of his teens. While the armor, with its abundant decoration, and the laurel crown attest to the figure's dignity, the wide-open mouth, eyes fixed skyward, and long wrinkles on the forehead betray an inner anxiety far removed from the character of a hero. Moreover, the bust of Saint John the Baptist possesses an ambiguity in expression, marked simultaneously by sweetness and melancholy, which the fine work in the carving of the marble has rendered with great subtlety. Though some areas, such as the locks of hair or the fur of the pelt, are treated with differences in texture, the soft modeling of the features allows light to glide over the polished surface, enabling the material to convey a psychological subtlety and intensity.[5] The *Martelli Saint John the Baptist*

presents, in all of its fullness of being, a paradoxically more determined—or at least less anguished—figure. The type of expression in this figure, "intense and abnormal," prompted Janson to attribute the work to Donatello, as Desiderio's works supposedly possessed neither the same psychological complexity nor expressive force, remaining bound to the charm and the delicacy of the children.[6]

And yet an expressive intensity appears to the full in several adult figures by Desiderio. In every case, this intensity depends on the theme treated: pathetic, moving, disturbing, poignant, or a mixture of one or more of these expressions, according to the subject. In the relief of the Pietà now located beneath the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo* (cat. 23), the expressions of the Virgin and the Baptist (figs. 27 and 28) are visibly strained: their cheekbones are placed abnormally high, their brows furrowed, and their eyebrows rippling. A thin crease runs from the nostrils to either side of the mouth. All of these features indicate the tension that finds expression in the figures' half-open mouths, which are so characteristic of Desiderio. The disheveled hair reinforces the feeling of disorder and affliction without reaching the levels Donatello exploited 30 years earlier in Rome[7] in a comparable entombment scene also intended for a eucharistic tabernacle, in which some of the figures verge on caricature as a result of the violence of their expression. This suffering is also conveyed in the disjointed rendering of the long, angular fingers clinging to Christ's arms or hanging alongside the sarcophagus. Although one should not over-interpret such a gesture, the expressive role of hands in this case becomes all the more clear when we contrast them with the more robust fingers of the right hand of the adoring angel in the Carlo Marsuppini tomb[8] (cat. 1) or those of the Baptist in the *Arconati Visconti Tondo* (cat. 12), delicately buried in the camel-hair fleece.

The Virgin and Child, treated in relief, is without any doubt the most commonly represented subject in 15th-century Florence. In the wake of the series of stucco and terracotta works generally attributed to Lorenzo Ghiberti and his workshop, the reliefs of the Virgin and Child form one of the high points in the rich, diverse inspiration of Donatello's work between the 1420s and 1450s. From the so-called *Pazzi Madonna* (fig. 29) to the *Virgin and Child* in the Duomo in Siena, all share a certain severity and great precision in the expression of the figures. The polychrome terracotta in the Louvre (RF 744) reveals exactly the same expression of surprise in the Child, combined with the intensity of the Virgin's gaze. In his sensitive approach to his figures, Desiderio adopted a different spirit. He replaced the uneasiness of Donatello's figures with a gaiety shared by both protagonists. This animation had consequences on a stylistic level. The figures in the *Foulc Madonna* (cat. 19) adopt a pose analogous to that in Donatello—the protective gesture of the Virgin's arm in the foreground, the head of the Child turned outward, following the Virgin's gaze—and the cherubs in low relief crowd the upper part of the background, as in the polychrome terracotta *Virgin and Child* from Berlin (Staatliche Museen, Skulpturensammlung, inv. 54). But the aforementioned smile of the Child is accompanied by a series of rounded features in the composition: flattened in the case of the halos and indicated only as slight salients for certain features of the faces (contours of the cheeks, eyebrows). And the accentuated delicacy of the Virgin's veil or of the Child's swaddling clothes maintains a firm plasticity,

Fig. 27
Desiderio da Settignano
Tabernacle of San Lorenzo
detail of face of the Virgin
marble
San Lorenzo, Florence

Fig. 28
Desiderio da Settignano
Tabernacle of San Lorenzo
detail of face of Saint John
marble
San Lorenzo, Florence

recalling the Virgin's drapery in the tondo of the Carlo Marsuppini tomb or the more rounded drapery of the Turin *Madonna and Child* (cat. 16). This softening in the rendering of drapery and flesh came to a logical conclusion in the *Panciatichi Madonna* (cat. 20 and fig. 30), which highlights both the gracefulness of a Child with dimpled flesh and the sweetness of face of a Virgin who resembles the Turin figure, but one treated with a greater softness and density (cat. 16). Although worked in broad planes, the dress and cloak of the *Panciatichi Madonna* also reveal the lightness of a fabric adhering to the body, with delicately undulating curves and folds structured in a more angular manner, and they constitute an exceptionally balanced ensemble of soft lines, lightness of form, and density in the rendering of material and texture that is representative of Desiderio's mature style. There is a frequently noted similarity with Antonio Rossellino,[9] but comparison shows us that the latter was an artist who treated volumes in a more angular way, capturing the light in a clearer manner (as in the *Altman Virgin and Child*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, inv. 14. 40. 675).

Fig. 29
Donatello
Virgin and Child, known as the *Pazzi Madonna*
marble
Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, inv. 56

This balance between delicacy and sweetness on the one hand and simplicity and solidity of form on the other recurs in the treatment of busts attributed to Desiderio. Numerous features stress the delicacy of the modeling: a gentle undulation of the flesh, a sinuous roundness to the lips, the elegance of wavy curls frequently carved in shallow low relief as in the *Young Girl* in the Bargello (cat. 6) or in the *Portrait of a Lady*, named as Marietta Strozzi (cat. 7) in Berlin. A certain idealization in the features arises from the religious character of some of the subjects. It is equally well suited to the secular female busts, the "official" nature of which also led to a broadly stylized execution. This abstract character of the figures is highlighted by numerous features: long almond eyes surrounded by curved eyelids with tapering but slightly rounded edges, their gaze lost in space, the thin, accentuated eyebrows that extend in a soft line toward the bridge of the nose, a broad, clear brow, and clothes rendered as simple and even surfaces—all capturing the light in a uniform manner to show the physiognomy of the sitter to best effect. The structural rigor of the figures, counterbalanced by the subtlety in the carving of the marble, undoubtedly constitutes one of Desiderio's greatest stylistic contributions to mid 15th-century art.

This firmness, which verges on austerity and is not generally associated with Desiderio's style, takes on greater significance in his work with elderly figures, whether religious or secular. Even without taking into account the *Mary Magdalene* in Santa Trinita—

Fig. 30
Desiderio da Settignano
Madonna and Child (The Panciatichi Madonna), detail
marble, ca. 1460
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. DEP. p. 92, no. 4

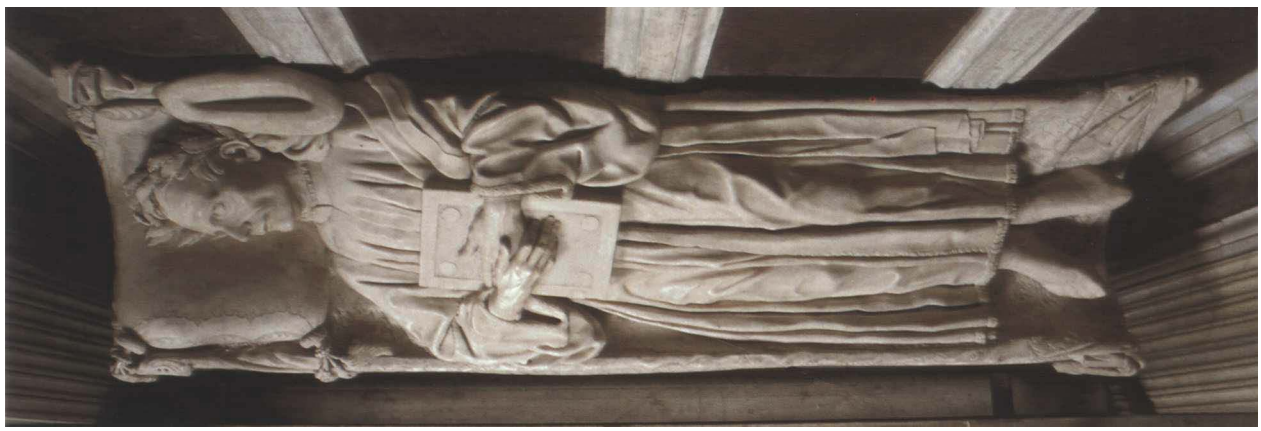
which according to recently discovered documents was finished by Giovanni d'Andrea,[10] thus depriving us of any certainty as to how Desiderio would have depicted an old woman—there are nevertheless at least three works that enable us to counter the rather sentimental image of our sculptor. For such an avowed portraitist as Desiderio, who, in his lifetime, saw the birth and development of the bust-portrait by artists such as Mino da Fiesole and Benedetto da Maiano, the absence of portraits of adult or elderly men with aged features might seem to be a deliberate stylistic choice. Like Antonio Rossellino, however, Desiderio executed that fundamental part of any funerary monument, namely the portrait of the deceased, in what was his first major work, the tomb of Carlo Marsuppini (cat. 1). The deeply wrinkled features, open brow, deep-set eyes beneath thick eyebrows, and the skin that clearly reveals the underlying bone structure all contribute to the subject's austere appearance. The rather dry figure of the chancellor of the Florentine republic contrasts with that of his predecessor, Lorenzo Bruni, who faces him on the other side of the nave in Santa Croce, treated by Bernardo Rossellino with slightly more plumpness in the modeling. The contrast is clearest in the folds of the two capes: Rossellino's is carved more deeply, with numerous linear elements combined with rounded ones, while Desiderio preferred to multiply flatter or slightly curved surfaces, thereby accentuating the diversity of the effects (fig. 32). The alternately angular and somewhat lumpy character of the drapery, which plays an important role in animating the surfaces, can also be perceived in the tunics of the angels bearing candlesticks in the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo* (cat. 23). In addition to the tomb of Carlo Marsuppini, the combination of a highly structured drapery and folds with cut corners with a severe concept of the figure recurs in the *Julius Caesar* (cat. 14). The areas of drapery hugging the skin are framed by folds that are both sinuous and sharp edged so that the effect of the drapery over the body resembles that of the flesh over the bones of the face. His profile, composed entirely of smooth masses, embodies the close alliance within Desiderio's modeling of a sensitivity to surface and of a dynamic handling of volumes. In the execution of reliefs, this combination of qualities undoubtedly accounts for Desiderio's finest work.

The *Saint Jerome in the Desert* (cat. 15) takes us perhaps even further away from this image of softness and suavity attributed to Desiderio by critics of his work. Not only

Fig. 31
Desiderio da Settignano (workshop of)
Young Child
terracotta with traces of polycromy
Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris, inv. 2151

Fig. 32
Desiderio da Settignano
and assistants
Funerary Monument
of Carlo Marsuppini
detail showing view from above
marble, ca. 1455–59
Santa Croce, Florence

do the features of Saint Jerome accentuate his emaciated face, but the overall landscape, composed of accumulations of angular rocks, echoes the figure itself. The technical virtuosity serves not to highlight the vaporous clouds, as in Donatello, but to render a solid, incisive structure that supports a mystical figure, underlining the resonance between the stones, the skull of Adam at the foot of the cross, carved in broad, sharp planes, and the saint himself. This scene, frequently depicted in late 15th-century Florentine sculpture, would never again reach such heights of expressive intensity.



1. On the questions raised by this concept, see Bialostocki 1968.
2. Preface to Dante, 1481, cited by Gilbert 1988, p. 213.
3. Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello, inv. 2 S. This is not the place to discuss the date of this work, which was certainly visible in Palazzo Vecchio from 1416; see exh. cat. Florence 1986-1, pp. 124–27; Rosenauer 1993, no. 1, pp. 51–52.
4. Rosenauer 1993, p. 47.
5. A photographic study conducted in 2006 by C2RMF (Anne Bouquillon and Jean-Jacques Ezrati) has made it possible to highlight the subtlety of the working of the marble in the Saint John the Baptist.
6. Janson 1957, p. 194.
7. *Tabernacle for the Eucharist*, Rome, Saint Peter's, Sacristy of the Beneficiati.
8. See the reversed detail of this hand in Cardellini 1962-1, p. 171.
9. Pope-Hennessy 1970, recalls the parallel relationship between Desiderio and Antonio Rossellino, defined by Weinberger, Middeldorf 1928, as "eine gewisse Ähnlichkeit mit Desiderio ... nur im Sinne einer zeitlichen Parallele," p. 144 and note 7, p. 154.
10. Waldman 2000.

DONATELLO AND DESIDERIO: A SUGGESTION AND SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE *MARTELLI SAINT JOHN*

Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi

"In the houses of the Martelli there are many narratives in marble and in bronze; among others, a *David* three braccia high, with many other works presented by him [Donatello] as a free gift to that family in proof of the devotion and love that he bore them; above all, a *Saint John* of marble, made by him in the round and three braccia high, a very rare work, which is today in the house of the heirs of Roberto Martelli, who had received it as a gift. With regard to this work, a legal agreement was made to the effect that it should be neither pledged, nor sold, nor given away, without heavy penalties, as a testimony and token of the affection shown by them to Donato, and by him to them out of gratitude that he had learnt his art through the protection and the opportunities that he received from them."[1] Thus Vasari, in the first edition of his *Lives* (1550), records how Donatello, with his "many works," settled the debt of gratitude he felt toward the family that had since childhood protected and encouraged him, and allowed his genius to flourish. If the role of patron played by the Martelli family toward Donatello is less explicit in the second edition of the *Lives* (1568), it is because in the meantime Vasari had "revised" his biography of the sculptor, paring down his almost hyperbolical panegyric of the old master so as not to cast a shadow on the rising star of Michelangelo Buonarroti. Vasari thereby obscured the generosity and assistance shown by the Martelli toward Donatello and in turn exalted his almost exclusive relationship with the Medici, in particular Cosimo the Elder. But we cannot be certain that this new version is any closer to the truth: documentation at hand has now confirmed the relationship between Donatello and the Martelli[2] and I do not believe that it is still possible to view their rapport as a simple legend dreamed up by Vasari, or the *fidecommisso* (family trust) set up by Francesco, son of Roberto Martelli, on the *Saint John* in the 1520s as just a crafty expedient by the owners to accredit the work definitively to the hand of the most famous sculptor of the quattrocento. The traditional attribution of the *Saint John* (fig. 33 and cat. 2) to Donatello is gaining ground today against the idea that it is the work of Desiderio, which has been widely supported, though it is based only on the formal aspects of the statue.[3] The considerations that follow are intended to suggest the possibility that both masters worked on the sculpture as personal friends and artistic partners—a relationship that must have been richly rewarding during the last decade of the life of both men, in particular when, having returned from Padua (1453), Donatello found Desiderio to

Fig. 33
Donatello and Desiderio da Settignano
The Martelli Saint John the Baptist
marble
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. Sculture 435

be the ideal disciple, capable of "following" his manner and carving to perfection the marble that he was no longer able to work on.

The anecdotal literature, which was in part assembled and employed by Vasari, has perpetuated the image of Donatello as a generous, uncomplicated man who was indifferent to money, which he left to everyone in his workshop.[4] Similarly, he was very open-handed with his friends: in the case of the Martelli, Vasari himself informs us that many of the sculptor's marble and bronze works—which remained in their houses and of which he mentions only the most famous—were presented as gifts to his benefactors. As the Martelli, like the Medici, were a special case, they would not have been the only ones to receive "presents" from Donatello. Given what we know of him, it is not difficult to imagine that it was his custom (as with nearly all artists) to give away small objects, perhaps made as trial pieces or for projects that were never completed, or perhaps rejected as being unsatisfactory or in some way imperfect. Works that had remained in the workshop for a long time would have been given away arbitrarily in circumstances as varied as they are unconfirmable, perhaps to settle small debts or as gifts to friends and visitors, illustrious and not. But they would also have been given to pupils and workshop assistants who in turn, through go-betweens and dealers, would have sold them off as works by the master's hand. I am thinking, for example, of the tondo in Vienna (cat. 21) owing to its imperfect casting, masked by the gilding, and with its lovely marble frame, apparently from a later date, and provenance from an ancient and prestigious collection in north Italy.[5]

Fig. 34
Donatello and assistants
Crucifixion
bronze
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. Bronzi 443

Confirmation that Donatello paid his debts with works was provided by the physician Giovanni Chellini, to whom in 1456 the sculptor gave a low relief of the *Madonna* that now bears his name (Victoria and Albert Museum, London)—it was one of the last important additions to the master's catalogue of works. "I recall," noted Chellini in his *Libro*, "that on 27 August 1456, having treated Donato, called Donatello, a singular and prestigious master who made figures in bronze, wood, and fired clay, who had made that large figure that is in a chapel above the door of Santa Reparata facing the Servites monastery, and had begun making another one 9 braccia high, he, out of his kindness and because of the medication I had been administering, gave me a roundel as big as a tray in which was fashioned the Virgin Mary with the Child in her arms and two angels at her sides, all made of bronze and hollowed out on the reverse side in order that molten glass could be poured into the impression and the said figures be reproduced from the other side."[6] As Donatello was then 70 years old

Fig. 35
Donatello and Antonio Rossellino
The Martelli David
marble
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Widener Collection, inv. 1942.9.115

and sick, and perhaps no longer considered he might move to Siena barely a year later, we may well wonder whether, in autumn 1457, these "gifts" may have suddenly become more numerous and sizable when he decided to close not just his workshop but also his house in Florence, "to die and to live" in Siena "for the remainder of his life."[7] That things went differently and he returned to Florence less than two years later makes no difference at all. The hypothesis, therefore, is that in the summer and autumn of 1457, Donatello distributed objects that had accumulated in his workshop (or, at any rate, in his rooms) over the years and that he had no intention of taking or could not take with him. Those works that could not be sold, which were often unfinished, he gave away as mementos to his friends, as an early "bequest" to his pupils, or to pay off old debts or simply as tokens of gratitude. It is within this last category that several of Donatello's important gifts to the Martelli family would have fallen: to Roberto, the *Saint John* (fig. 33 and cat. 2), which he had sculpted 20 or so years earlier (ca. 1438–40) for an unknown destination and almost "finished" (but probably also the most recent low relief of the Crucifixion in gold damascened bronze, fig. 34)[8]; to the elder brother Ugolino, the marble *David* (fig. 35), which was even less "finished," even older,[9] and the first present made by Donatello to the Martelli household to be mentioned by Vasari. The writer made no comment on the work—unlike the praise he heaped on the statue given to Roberto—perhaps because of the disfigurement resulting from later "finishings."[10] We therefore consider that the *Saint John* was completed in a worthy manner by Desiderio in about 1457–59,[11] and the *David* a little less admirably, perhaps by Antonio Rossellino, at about the same time.[12] It is also plausible that Donatello himself instructed the most talented young sculptors still working for him in Florence to finish these early works for the Martelli family. It was at that time, moreover, that Desiderio was working on the base of the bronze *David* for the courtyard of Palazzo Medici, which he completed in 1459. And Antonio had already

distinguished himself in the bust-portrait of the doctor Giovanni Chellini, dated 1456, the same year that Donatello gave him the tondo mentioned earlier.

Furthermore, that the *Martelli David* was still in Donatello's workshop in the 1450s is attested by the number and success of the small works derived from it and by the acclaim that the large statue received later despite its sorry state.[13] That it appeared in the background of the *Portrait of Ugolino Martelli* by Bronzino (fig. 36) is because nothing was able to evoke the subject's forebear more clearly and with such prestige as this "relic" by Donatello, which was linked to the name Ugolino and still a possession of the family.

Fig. 36
Agnolo Bronzino
Portrait of Ugolino Martelli
oil on panel (poplar)
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, SMPK, inv. 338 A

Whereas technical analysis of the surface of the *David* has shown that it was subjected to poor quality finishing before 1550 (we know this because in Bronzino's painting, dated 1540, it is seen in its current state),[14] the work on the other Martelli statue, the *Saint John* belonging to Roberto, which was described by Vasari as completely "finished" by the master (at least in comparison to the other), is less evident. Indeed, until today it has been above all the "waxy" quality and smoothness of the surfaces and the delicacy of the modeling of the figure that have convinced experts to switch attribution of the statue from Donatello to Desiderio, as the possibility that the master and his pupil worked on it together seems too improbable for chronological reasons. For supporters of Desiderio's claim, the work must not necessarily have been executed before the mid-1450s, but more likely toward the end of the decade, when Donatello's influence over the young master was at its greatest, as evinced by the wooden *Magdalen* made for the church of Santa Trinita in Florence (figs. 4, 14, 40), which Desiderio began at about that date.[15]

If we suppose that Desiderio completed Donatello's statue in about 1457–59, we have to define what work he executed on it and find evidence of it. The statue seems to have been made to fill a niche—presumably as part of an altar—but was never placed there. For it to be suitable for the house of Roberto Martelli, it had to be not only given a finish and "modernized," but also perhaps reduced considerably in size in terms of the base and the overall volume of the figure. Thus, given how it appeared in the Martelli household, at least in its 18th-century setting (fig. 43), and still more as it is presented today in the museum, standing freely in space, the

Fig. 37
Donatello
Saint John the Baptist
polychrome wood, dated 1438
Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, Venice

figure of the saint seems markedly slender when seen from the sides (figs. 41), and closely resembles the profile of the *Magdalen* in Santa Trinita (fig. 40).

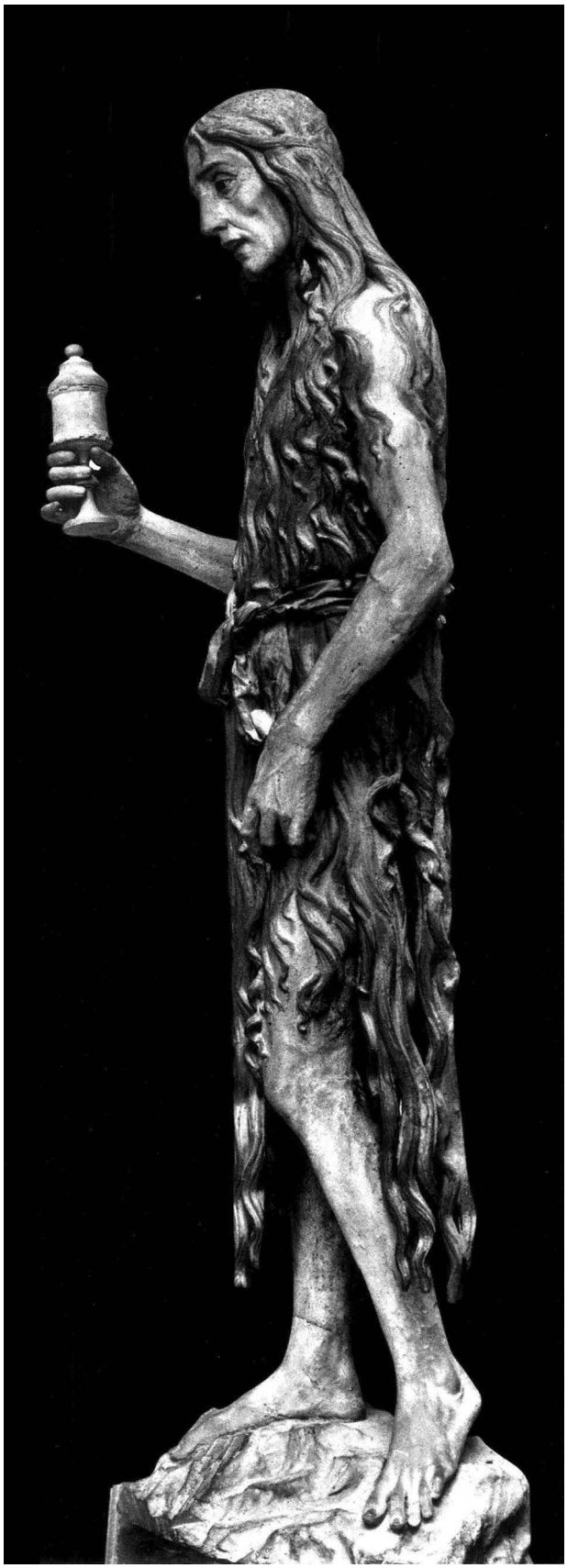
That said, there are many valid historical and stylistic reasons that have recently been put forward by Francesco Caglioti to substantiate attribution of the sculpture solely to Donatello, and its date of execution to about 1442 immediately after the artist's departure for Padua. In particular, some connection between the Martelli statue and the *Saint John the Baptist* in the Roberti-Frigimelica polyptych painted by Giorgio Schiavone (fig. 39) seems undeniable. This painting demonstrates that the figure was familiar in all its details in Padua, before 1460—a familiarity that the painter probably obtained from a small plaster model.[16] Caglioti points out how the significant variation between the sculpture and the painting lies in the difference in age: in the statue he is a boy, but he is mature and bearded (in accordance with traditional iconography) in the painting. This is a reasonable "modification" to the excessively unusual figure in the sculpture, where the Baptist was portrayed for the first time as an adolescent. The other difference that Caglioti remarks upon is that, compared to the statue, the painting displays an "image very much expanded, both to the right and the left," which is obtained by copying the model, by "moving around the object, or by turning it around in front of himself." He decomposes and recomposes it "in an almost 'cubist' manner," and portrays it from a higher viewpoint.[17] In my opinion, this "expansion" is also due to the broad cloak that in Schiavone's painting entirely enwraps the lower half of the figure and falls in wide folds to the ground. On the left side of the saint, the cloak covers his shoulder and all of one arm; on the right, its edge is lifted and held in the saint's hand so that it reveals the knee. In the statue, the cloak is simply a narrow, closely fitting length of cloth that falls vertically from the left shoulder to the ground, leaving the right side of the figure completely exposed (fig. 41). However, in Donatello's original figure (and in the plaster models made from it) the cloak was to be more ample and more

Fig. 38
Donatello and Desiderio
da Settignano
The Martelli Saint John the Baptist,
right profile
marble
Museo Nazionale del Bargello,
Florence, inv. Sculture 435

Fig. 39
Giorgio Schiavone
Roberti-Frigimelica Polyptych,
detail of Saint John the Baptist
tempera on panel, ca. 1456–61
National Gallery, London,
inv. NG 630.1

Fig. 40
Desiderio da Settignano,
completed by Giovanni d'Andrea
(formerly attributed
to Benedetto da Maiano)
Mary Magdalene, before restoration
polychrome, wood, and gesso,
1458–99
Santa Trinita, Florence

Fig. 41
Donatello and Desiderio
da Settignano
The Martelli Saint John the Baptist,
left profile, marble
Museo Nazionale del Bargello,
Florence, inv. Sculture 435



similar to the one in the painting: a trace of it remains in the soft and apparently undefined mass held by the saint's right hand, into which his fingers dig (fig. 44). Probably, not having much experience of statues in the round, in his finishing of the sculpture and his "lightening" of the figure, Desiderio did not dare to remove this remnant of the old cloak for static reasons (fig. 41).[18] What remained on the left side now appears as vertical, heavy drapery that falls to the ground in a series of deep folds. Its adherence to the figure and left leg in particular strongly accentuates a *ponderatio* in that section of the sculpture, thereby contrasting the extreme lightness of the right leg (which is exposed and hardly touches the ground; fig. 38) and giving the statue a lack of balance. In the short section of the drapery that remained on the back of the work (ill. p. 127), the cloak and its folds do not end but appear to "blend" into the base or surface. It has clearly been reduced from the size conceived for the larger original base, onto which the broad folds of the cloak must have fallen to the left and right, as in the painting.

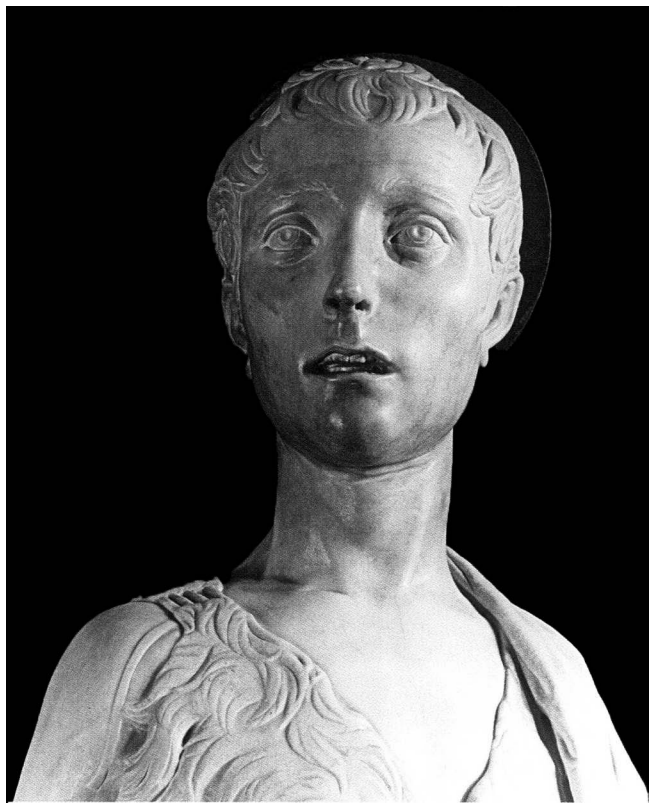


Fig. 42
Donatello and Desiderio da Settignano
The Martelli Saint John the Baptist, detail of face
marble
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. Sculture 435

Also taking into account the statue's new domestic destination, Desiderio would have emphasized the verticality of the figure, removing as much of its drapery as possible and freeing the figure's limbs so that they could be penetrated by space and light, though in doing so he revealed certain technical limitations not apparent even in Donatello's youthful works. Such weaknesses may not be explained simply by Desiderio's lack of experience in statuary, but perhaps by a natural reticence in having to make alterations to a masterpiece by his teacher.

If all of this is true, we can attribute more to Desiderio than the removal of the cloak. He may also have been responsible for the "perfection" of all the surfaces and even the modeling of some parts, especially in the right half of the figure: for instance, the knot of the tunic, which lies loosely on the highly polished thigh, or the belt draped around the saint's waist, as light as gauze and just like the ribbon that gathers together the hair of the *Young Girl* in the Bargello (cat. 6). More typical of Donatello are the flattened scroll (as sharp as a silver blade), pressed by the saint's forefinger and middle finger to hold it open—this gesture is repeated identically in the figure of the *Baptist* in the Frari (fig. 37) and in Siena—and the vigorous serpentiform curls of the tunic on the left side that help to create a plastic definition of the forms on that side. Characteristic of Desiderio, though, are the flatter and clearly defined locks of fleece that act as supports to the highly fragile right arm (fig. 44). Whether or not the figure was really started by Donatello—if not completely finished, as Vasari

Fig. 43
Giovan Battista Benigni
Drawing Room in the Casa Martelli
1777
Palazzo Martelli, Florence,
inv. Dipinti e sculture 40

says—it seems to have been revised throughout by Desiderio, "caressed" by his pumice stone and finest emery cloth, harmonized by his delicate breath, without erasing anything actually done by the master: for example, the young saint's eyebrows, which are incised like deep but thin commas on his forehead and never seen in any of the faces that Desiderio produced, or the cleanly defined irises and sunken pupils that together represent the Baptist's spent but visionary gaze (fig. 42), which Desiderio would have left empty beneath the eyelids.

If Donatello and Desiderio worked separately on the *Saint John* at different times, they must have worked as partners both before and after Donatello's stay in Siena[19] at least on commissions for the Martelli family: for example, the hard sandstone *Coat of Arms*, today in the Bargello (fig. 45), which was probably designed and made under the direction of Donatello in about 1455–57 for Roberto's new Palazzo Martelli, though in the workshop of Geri and Desiderio,[20] or the marble sarcophagus in the church of San Lorenzo made for Niccolò and Fioretta Martelli. Documentation tells us that it was paid for in 1463–64 and that, more important, Desiderio and his assistants must have worked on it, though to Donatello's design.[21]

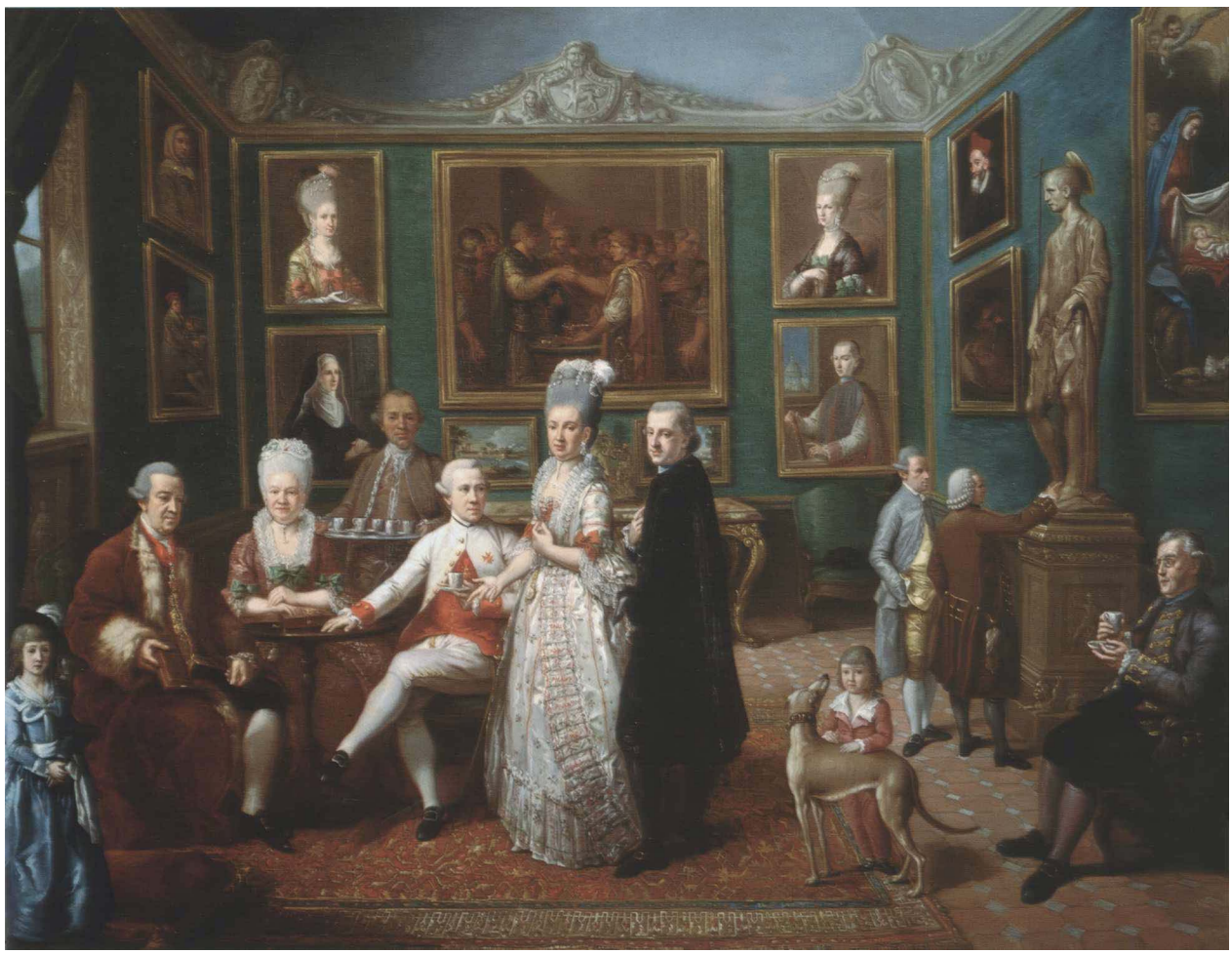


Fig. 44
Donatello and Desiderio
da Settignano
The Martelli Saint John the Baptist,
detail of right hand
marble
Museo Nazionale del Bargello,
Florence, inv. Sculture 435

Fig. 45
Donatello (workshop of Geri and Desiderio da Settignano)
Martelli Coat of Arms
polychrome *pietra serena*, gold leaf, ca. 1455
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. Sculture 532

In any case, the Medici Basilica of San Lorenzo—with its reliefs of the Passion by Donatello and Desiderio's Tabernacle of the Sacrament (cat. 23), not to mention greater works by both executed at the same time in this church—must have been the last great work site of both their careers. They both worked there in 1460, perhaps in expectation of a great project that never came to anything:[22] it would have been so important that it would have allowed for no distractions, as Desiderio was to say to Francesco Sforza through Tranchedini, his ambassador, who had asked him to produce a Madonna,[23] and so stimulating as to convince Donatello, in 1459, to leave Siena under cover of darkness, like a thief, and to destroy his models for the doors of the cathedral, thus losing two years of work.[24]

1. Vasari 1550, III, pp. 212–13. Less explicit (yet equally comprehensible) is mention of the gift of the statue to Roberto Martelli by the artist in the second edition of Vasari's *Lives* (1568), where the phrase "which he received as a gift" was omitted by the author, though the rest of the passage remained identical (Vasari-Milanesi, II, pp. 408–9). That the work was a gift by Donatello to the Martelli family is corroborated by Vasari in a passage of the *Life* of Tribolo (Vasari-Milanesi, VI, pp. 89–90). On the very close relations between Vasari and the Martelli family, which make his account so much more credible, see Civai 1990, in particular pages 24, 42, and 33 (notes 69–76, 81). Vasari was commissioned to paint the altarpiece of the Martelli chapel in San Lorenzo by Gismondo Martelli.

2. See Civai 1989 and 1990.

3. With the exception of the payment of two florins by Martelli to Desiderio (see Beck 1984, p. 212, no. 1 and further ahead in the text). On the critical success of the *Martelli Saint John* and the debate over its authorship, see the entry on the work.

4. As recalled by Pomponius Gauricus in *De Sculptura* (1504, p. 53).

5. On the role and the customs of dealers and go-betweens (for example, Bartolomeo di Paolo di Giovanni Serragli in the case of Desiderio) in the purchase of works by established Florentine masters, and their resale, see Goldthwaite 1996, pp. 179–94, and the essay by Francesco Caglioti in this catalogue. On the bronze plaque in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, see the entry by Claudia Kryza-Gersch (cat. 21). The work belonged to the distinguished Obizi del Cataio family. Pope-Hennessy (1993, pp. 259, 344) dates the tondo to 1440 and the marble frame to approximately 1475, making reference to Francesco di Simone.

6. See Lightbown 1962, pp. 102–4; Radcliffe 1986, pp. 160–62.

7. See Herzner 1971, p. 179, doc. nos. 3, 4; Milanesi 1854, II, pp. 295–96.

8. Included by Francesco di Roberto Martelli with the *Saint John* in the same trust of 1523 (see the entry on the work). Probably the *Crucifixion* by Donatello left by Roberto Martelli is the one today in the Bargello: it was registered in the collections of Cosimo I de' Medici in the 1550s, contemporaneous with the disappearance of the Martelli *Crucifixion* from the family inventories. On this, see Civai 1990, pp. 28–29, and earlier bibliography. The work—which displays inventions typical of Donatello and was executed at least in part by the workshop—can be dated to the mid-1450s, either shortly after the return of Donatello from Padua, or immediately before (Pope-Hennessy 1993, p. 251).

9. Janson's suggested dating for execution of the structure of the figure by Donatello is 1410–12 (1957, II, pp. 22–23), but closer to the start of the 1420s is more probable: Giancarlo Gentilini has pointed out significant similarities in the pose and drapery of the *David* with the *Sacrifice of Isaac* for the bell tower, which Donatello sculpted in the early 1420s. On the Martelli *David*, see Schlegel 1968, pp. 245–48 (Bernardo Rossellino); Lewis 1986, pp. 231–33 (Bernardo or Antonio Rossellino), and earlier bibliography. Attribution to Desiderio is given by Herzner (1982, pp. 107–87) and Caglioti (2000, pp. 252–53, particularly p. 252 and note 116). Also to be remembered, as another possible gift by the artist, is the bronze *Saint John the Baptist*, also attributed to Donatello, which formerly belonged to Ugolino Martelli and was destroyed in the museums of Berlin during World War II. On this see Civai 1990, pp. 29–30 and fig. 8 (and earlier bibliography).

10. On this aspect see Lewis 1986, pp. 231–33; for a critical overview, Radke 2003, pp. 35–53, in particular pp. 44–45.

11. As also confirmed by the payment of two florins to Desiderio by Roberto Martelli in 1460 (see Beck 1984, p. 212, no. 1).

12. If not by Desiderio himself, as Herzner and Caglioti believe. On this very controversial sculpture, documented to have remained in the household of the descendants of Ugolino Martelli until 1448, with different attributions and dates, though mostly assigned to the hand of Bernardo or Antonio Rossellino from a design by Donatello about 1460, see Lewis 1986, pp. 231–33, and earlier bibliography; Janson 1957, II, pp. 191–96, attributed to Donatello (ca. 1410–12) and successive phases of completion.

13. See Lewis 1986, pp. 143–44, with particular reference to the problematic bronze statuette in Berlin, which has been referred by Schlegel to Donatello's workshop during the 1460s. Later, as was pointed out to me by Tommaso Mozzati, this would inspire Rustici (who then lived in the Martelli household) to sketch the *David* (now in the Louvre), which was supposed to replace Donatello's version in the courtyard of Palazzo Medici.

14. See Cropper 1985; for phases of completion of the sculpture, see Lewis 1986, pp. 232–33.

15. On all this, see the entry on the *Martelli Saint John*.

16. Caglioti 2000, pp. 158–59, particularly note 22 and figs. 179–80. The relationship between the Martelli sculpture and Schiavone's painting had been pointed out by Collareta 1998, pp. 29–36, p. 35, and note 23, figs. 4–5.

17. Caglioti 2000, p. 158, note 22.

18. This seems to be borne out by an ancient and highly evident iron pin, which, at that very fragile point, pierced the marble to hold the right arm to the rest of the figure.

19. On this see Pope-Hennessy 1993, particularly p. 276; Darr-Prayer 1999, particularly pp. 724–25.

20. On this hypothesis and Geri's specialization in stone artifacts, see Darr-Prayer 1999, pp. 720–31, particularly pp. 724–25.

21. See Civai 1989, p. 256.

22. On this, see Gentilini's hypothesis regarding the construction of a large mausoleum for Cosimo the Elder, for which four marble bases today in the Bargello may have been prepared (Gentilini 1985, pp. 286–97).

23. 17 February 1462. See Spencer 1968, pp. 131–33.

24. See the account in Vasari-Milanesi, II, p. 415.

DESIDERIO AND LOW RELIEF

Nicholas Penny

"They are haters of all heaviness and emphasis, of strongly opposed light and shade, and seek their means of delineation among those last refinements of shadow, which are almost invisible except in a strong light, and which the finest pencil can hardly follow. The whole essence of their work is *expression*, the passing of a smile over the face of a child, the ripple of the air on a still day over the curtain of a window ajar." This is how Walter Pater, in his essay of 1872 on Luca della Robbia, characterized the Tuscan sculptors of the 15th century who "worked for the most part in low relief."[1] He mentions Donatello, Mino da Fiesole, and (surprisingly) Maso del Rodario, as well as Luca himself, and he was certainly keenly aware of the work of Antonio Rossellino, whose tomb of the cardinal of Portugal he dwells upon in an essay written a year earlier.[2] But the artist whose work is chiefly recalled for us by this passage is Desiderio da Settignano. Desiderio is nowhere mentioned by Pater and yet it must have been his sculpture that inspired him—some of it known to him under other names, and some of it only by its reflections in the work of others. Desiderio's sculpture was also, at that date, beginning to influence modern art of many different types, ranging from the whispering spirits carved in low relief by the American Thomas Ball to the laughing urchin modeled in wax by Medardo Rosso.

Pater understood that the low-relief carving as practiced by Tuscan sculptors of the 15th century (now commonly called *stiacciato*, although this term was not commonly used in the Renaissance[3]) was concerned with suggesting elusive effects and that this could influence the practice of sculpture in the round. The sculptor who has depicted mountains half-veiled in cloud and cherubim that flutter into view—or vanish—as the light changes or we alter, even only slightly, our point of view, is perhaps more likely to pursue subtleties of facial expression in bust-portraits and in monumental effigies—the laughter of a delighted infant or the way the sunken features of the dead can seem at peace, and even etherealized.

Fig. 46
Desiderio da Settignano
Virgin and Child (The Foulc Madonna), detail
marble, early 1460s
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Acquired from the Edmond Foulc Collection, with funds from W. P. Wilstach, in 1930, inv. 30-1-73

No critic since Pater has so successfully epitomized Desiderio's two most characteristic and original achievements: his ability to represent movement both in the features of the human face and in the lightest of textiles. More remarkable still is his implicit recognition of the connection between the two. Desiderio is especially distinguished for his use of aerial perspective, his airy distances, as well as for the "airs," the ineffable grace of demeanor and expression, that he gave especially to female

or juvenile faces. He also excelled in suggesting the breeze that is so welcome in a warm climate and gives to a scene of tranquility the slight animation and flutter that is essential to its appeal.

Desiderio did not in fact ever depict a "window ajar" (meaning a glass-paned casement window slightly open) nor did he depict curtains (which were not then used for windows), but the idea of the window comes often to the viewer's mind, not because of his use of a sharply defined frame or ledge, not because he provides us with a realistic representation of buildings and landscape that one might look at from such an opening, but because space, in his sculpture, is inseparable from the idea of air in motion. At the lower edge of the *Foulc Madonna* (fig. 46 and cat. 19) the very frame becomes a cloud interlaced with the fingers of the Virgin herself.

The pioneers of linear perspective rejoiced in their ability to represent a solid three-dimensional world; their successors were more interested in transparency, and Desiderio especially so. The fictional architecture of his San Lorenzo tabernacle is a building without walls, with arched openings into which angels easily fly. The mountain in his relief of Saint Jerome is penetrated, diagonally, by a cave, and the shelves of sedimentary rock of which it is composed are only a little less shallow than the horizontal strata of the clouds in the sky, with which they are rhymed (fig. 47 and cat. 15).

Desiderio's inventions are consistently unarchitectonic, as becomes clear when this tabernacle is compared with those by Bernardo Rossellino, Luca della Robbia, or Donatello. Desiderio's segmental pediment (fig. 48) is merely a frame that opens onto the sky and much of that frame is concealed by child angels in precarious poses, rushing forward to adore the infant Christ. He is perched upon a chalice, an original form of support that anticipates the slender baluster pedestals soon to be invented by Verrocchio for gymnastic fountain putti. The sacred is conceived of as a defiance of gravity—or rather, as indifference to support—at which the winged angels and cherubim marvel. If his figures in movement can seem precarious, then a certain fragility is to be noted in his stationary figures. The putti flanking the Marsuppini tomb would have difficulty in carrying their shields, while the older but very narrow-shouldered youths flanking the tabernacle could not easily lift the candelabra they support.

Fig. 47
Desiderio da Settignano
Saint Jerome in the Desert,
landscape details
marble, ca. 1460–64
National Gallery of Art,
Washington, Widener Collection,
inv. 1942.9.113

The bier upon which Leonardo Bruni lies in state in the tomb that Bernardo Rossellino made for him in Santa Croce (fig. 49) is a sarcophagus that has all the solidity of a plinth—Rossellino was indeed an architect as well as a sculptor. The sarcophagus in Desiderio's Marsuppini tomb in the same church is far more elaborate (fig. 50). It is derived from altars of triangular plan and from the altarlike supporting elements of candelabra (both real candelabra and the ones that were represented in relief as pilaster ornaments). What strikes us, first, is the pierced spiral of acanthus at the corners that, together with the undercutting of the leaves below, is a breathtaking demonstration of technical virtuosity. But on closer examination there is something equally remarkable about the way that the leaves appear to recede from the front plane of the chest. When Andrea Verrocchio used a similar form of sarcophagus, with lions' paws and acanthus, for the Medici tomb in the Old Sacristy of San Lorenzo (fig. 51), he gave the foliage, cast in bronze, an extraordinary plasticity, and allowed it to break forward at the corners. From an architectural point of view this idea is more satisfying, although less extraordinary, than Desiderio's, since it does not deny the solidity of the sarcophagus, which in this case is of course porphyry.

Fig. 48
Desiderio da Settignano
Tabernacle of San Lorenzo, detail of the pediment
marble
San Lorenzo, Florence

Fig. 49
Bernardo Rossellino
Funerary Monument of Leonardo Bruni
marble
Santa Croce, Florence

Fig. 50
Desiderio da Settignano
and assistants
Funerary Monument
of Carlo Marsuppini,
detail of the sarcophagus
marble, ca. 1455–59
Santa Croce, Florence

Fig. 51
Andrea del Verrocchio
Tomb of Giovanni and Piero
de' Medici, detail
of the sarcophagus
marble, porphyry, bronze,
ca. 1469–72
San Lorenzo, Florence

It may seem odd to discuss this sarcophagus in connection with Desiderio's work as a sculptor in relief, yet nothing is more revealing of Desiderio's originality as a sculptor (and for some critics perhaps also more revealing of his limitations) than the way he converted it into an ambiguous airy space in the center of which a tablet is miraculously suspended by delicate ribbons attached to the finest tendrils and supported by a thin scallop shell and outspread wings. Related to this are the busts in shells that float in the frieze of the great *pietra serena* chimneypiece in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which must be a product of Desiderio's workshop. They were inspired by a type of portrait found on Roman sarcophagi but are far more elegant, and so light that we might think of them as spirits of the departed in flight, although here they probably represent a young married couple (fig. 52).

Desiderio's low reliefs can at times resemble drawings, sufficiently so for us to speak of his line. We may follow, for instance, the contours of the overlapping halos of the Turin Virgin and Child, and their relationship to the lines of Christ's cheek and the Virgin's scarf—nearly segmental lines but with ingenious deviations from abstract purity. Lines are in fact seldom two-dimensional in his work; they never merely decorate the front plane but always wander into space, however shallow, and it is so striking how, with the exception of his ideal heads conceived *all'antica*, he avoids the profile and prefers the face with "an eye and a half" (to borrow an expression employed in Italian inventories). The head of Jerome (fig. 53) in the National Gallery's relief and that of the young Saint John the Baptist in the Louvre's tondo (cat. 12) are notable examples.

Desiderio is recorded as working in wood and clay, materials that were then invariably coated with gesso and painted.[4] Examination of the Marsuppini tomb has revealed that the white marble was enhanced in parts by color as well as gilding.[5] His marble reliefs were also reproduced in *cartapesta* and in gesso, which were also colored, apparently in his own lifetime and so probably with his consent, possibly even at his instigation. But we can be certain that the result was not always to his satisfaction, since the spatial subtlety and unity of his inventions are impaired when the veil or the hair is contrasted in color with the sky over which it floats, and the faintly etched cypress on the horizon is a distinct accent.

Full appreciation of Desiderio's marble reliefs requires good daylight from high up and from one side only. Electric light directed from in front, and above all when it comes from two directions, is nearly always fatal. And it is significant that the best photographs of his sculptures were made a hundred years ago, before museums had studios and before photographers had begun to depend upon their lamps. We might indeed be tempted to argue that the convention of examining works of art closely in a domestic setting was a precondition for the sculptor's invention of effects that could only be perfectly appreciated in these circumstances. But there are reasons to doubt this.

The earliest low reliefs of the Renaissance are by Donatello. Whereas it is true that his *Feast of Herod* in the Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille and his *Madonna of the Clouds*

in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (fig. 57) may have been created as works of domestic devotion, his relief of the Entombment incorporated in the sacramental tabernacle in Saint Peter's (fig. 58) is no less remarkable as an example of this style. In Desiderio's work there is certainly no strong separation of the public from the private. The *Foulc Madonna* (cat. 19), for example, is close in style to the tondo of the Virgin and Child in the Marsuppini tomb (cat. 1). We may doubt whether he took much account, in his public works, of the probable distance of the viewer from the work of art. It can never have been easy to admire the miniature cherubim in the frieze of his San Lorenzo tabernacle (cat. 23). Some of the bold drill work on the heads of the kneeling angels above—and elsewhere in Desiderio's sculpture—may have been designed, perhaps as an afterthought, to catch the eye with more distinct shadows. But, even if so, the infant Christ on top of this tabernacle was actually taken down for more intimate devotional attention and is very similar in finish to his bust-portraits of children.

The reliefs on Florentine tombs remind us of the relatively high positions in which sculptures must often have been displayed in domestic settings. Desiderio was evidently not insistent on perspectival consistency—he was prepared to tilt Marsuppini's effigy, for instance, to make it more visible—and the treatment of the frames of his reliefs does not tell us much about the angle at which they were meant to be viewed. There are, however, clues. In the Turin relief the Virgin looks down at us, and in the Washington relief of Jerome in the desert the entire illusion of the

Fig. 52
Desiderio da Settignano
(workshop of)
Fireplace from Palazzo Boni
pietra serena
Victoria and Albert Museum,
London, inv. 5896-1859

space between Jerome and his cave is lost if it is hung low enough for us to see that his praying hands are actually attached to the cave.

It still seems unlikely that mere coincidence could account for the fact that the invention of marble carving in very low relief coincided with the period when the collecting of engraved gems and cameos became fashionable among the Florentine elite. To appreciate such miniature sculptures fully, they must be turned. The positive image of an intaglio gem can only be discerned when light is reflected from its hollows, but for the color of the stone to be visible, light must shine through it. The different strata of stone employed in cameo carving requires a type of very low relief in order to exploit the translucency of one stratum against another, and to appreciate this effect the stone must be moved. We must feel that Desiderio, like Donatello in his first extraordinary inventions in low relief, treated marble as a precious stone, valuing its translucency, its textures and polish, and every alteration to its crystalline structure and reflective quality made by scratching a line in its surface.

Fig. 53
Desiderio da Settignano
Saint Jerome in the Desert,
detail of the head
of Saint Jerome
marble
National Gallery of Art,
Washington, Widener Collection,
inv. 1942.9.113

The taste for cameos may have prompted a very different development in relief sculpture, one in which Desiderio had no interest—the use of a ground of contrasting color. The figures in Florentine relief sculpture had indeed often been set off by an inlay of blue glass or mosaic, and in some of Donatello's sculpture we find a revival of interest in this technique, together with new devices such as placing gilded bronze figures against colored stone.[6] And of course the use of a blue background for white figures was the norm in Luca della Robbia's glazed terracotta reliefs.

Whatever the debt such sculpture sometimes owes to cameos, a more important influence was simply the concern to make sculpture legible from a distance. Here Desiderio may have been influential in a negative sense, for by making sculpture that was so dependent on special lighting conditions, he had deprived it of one of its powers—one that was especially necessary for its impact as architectural decoration. By the 1470s new directions in Florentine sculpture were being established by Verrocchio. His *Putto with a Dolphin* may owe something to Desiderio's infants, as Alison Luchs points out, and his porphyry and bronze Medici tomb in San Lorenzo derives, as noted earlier, from the chest in Desiderio's Marsuppini tomb in Santa Croce, but we observe in Verrocchio an impatience with those refinements of facial expression, of soft hair bound in silken veils, "the ripple of the air on a still day," and a greater concern with monumentality and the heroic, as well as for an emphatic plasticity.

Verrocchio's reliefs are not distinguished for either their linear or their aerial perspective. The figures in his *Execution of John the Baptist*, perhaps partly because they are separately finished and attached to the ground, are not fully integrated with the

setting, and for all their startling three-dimensionality, they appear to be constrained by the stage they occupy. Even in the terracotta sketch model for the monument of Cardinal Forteguerri with its flying angels there is an awareness of the ground against which the further limbs seem to press and an entirely perfunctory attitude to clouds, which are reduced to providing an occasional platform for a foot (fig. 54).

The relief tondo was revived by Michelangelo and, probably under his influence, by Gianfrancesco Rustici (born in 1474, ten years after Desiderio's death). The latter's tondo in the Bargello (fig. 56) has often, reasonably, been thought to owe something to Desiderio's Turin relief, but two features of Rustici's work distinguish it from that of Desiderio. The background has a punched texture that denies any spatial recession, and although the young Saint John is smaller in scale, he is not significantly lower in relief. Faint low relief had by no means disappeared from European sculpture, but not until Clodion in 18th-century France would it be given the importance that it had in Florence during the mid-15th century.

If there was a reaction in Florence against Desiderio's style of carving, there was no lack of interest in his formal inventions. Raphael's large *Cowper Madonna* (fig. 55), to give only one example, would be impossible without the example of the Turin relief. And Desiderio's preoccupation with exploring the interaction of mother and child, with depicting the "passing of a smile" and the "ripple of air," as well as his precocious

Fig. 54
Andrea del Verrocchio
Sketch Model for the Monument of Cardinal Niccolò Forteguerri
terracotta, ca. 1476
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. 7599-1861

Fig. 55
Raphael
Virgin and Child, called the *Cowper Madonna*
oil on canvas, 1508
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Andrew W. Mellon Collection, inv. 1937-1.25

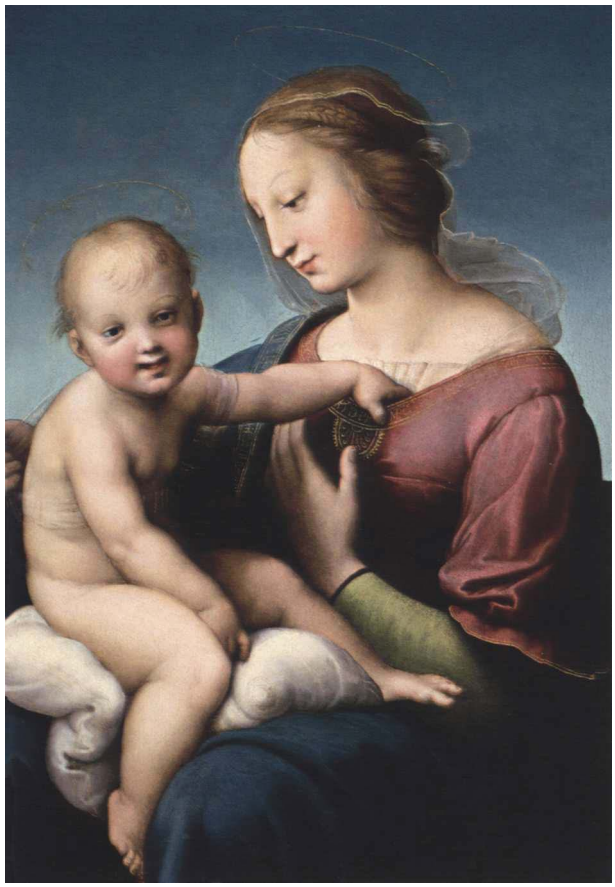
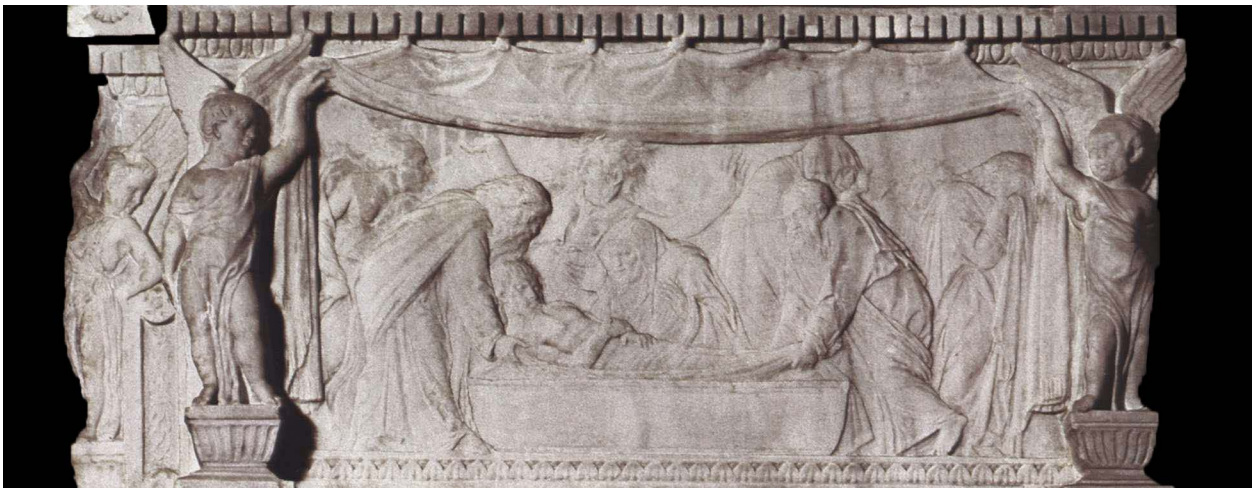


Fig. 56
Gianfrancesco Rustici
Virgin and Child with the Young Saint John the Baptist
marble
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. Sculture 102

interest in sfumato and in aerial perspective, had a profound influence on the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci.[7] We might therefore propose that his importance in the history of art was even greater than his significance in the history of sculpture.

Fig. 57
Donatello
Virgin and Child, called *Madonna of the Clouds*
marble
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift from the Quincy Adams Shaw collection, by Quincy Adams Shaw Jr and Mrs. Marian Shaw Haughton, inv. 17-1470

Fig. 58
Donatello
Tabernacle of the Holy Sacrament, detail of the Entombment
marble, ca. 1432–33
Saint Peter's, Rome, Museo Petriano



1. Pater 1980, p. 50; pp. 49–56 for the whole essay.
2. "The Poetry of Michelangelo," in Pater 1980, pp. 57–76.
3. See Godby 1980; he demonstrates that when the word was used it was applied to reliefs in which the forms were flattened rather than simply in low relief. This flattened style may have been introduced by woodcarvers who have an interest in the compression of relief forms into superimposed planks.
4. See especially Coonin 1995-3, pp. 199–214.
5. Weeks 1999.
6. For speculation on this subject, see Penny 1994.
7. For very suggestive observations on this subject, see Weil-Garris Brandt 1999, especially pp. 26–27 (on low relief) and p. 29 on "bellezza sfumata" and the eloquent juxtapositions of figs. 49–51.

DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO: PROFILES OF HEROES AND HEROINES OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

Francesco Caglioti

Among the many artistic achievements of Desiderio's short, dazzling career is an important one that seems to have been insufficiently studied and thus will be considered briefly in these pages. I am referring to his decisive role, perhaps as inventor, in popularizing one of the most successful sculptural genres of the early Renaissance in Italy and later in Europe: the relief with the head or bust in profile of an emperor or other leading figure from ancient political and military history.

It would be both presumptuous and risky to attempt to establish a point of origin and specific authorship for a type of representation that had its ultimate source in coins and carved stones—Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman—that is to say, in the most abundant and secure examples of figural imagery in classical civilization. Nor could this form of portraiture have been long forgotten in Western history, at least since the time of the first medieval "renaissances." Rediscoveries made to date suggest, however, that credit for isolating profiles of figures from antiquity in individual rectangular panels, made of Apuan marble or local stone, belongs to Florence in the middle of the quattrocento, in particular to the sculptors closest to the Medici family. Due to their small size and ease of handling, these objects were ordered, made, sold, or given away in varied quantities and diverse iconographic combinations, according to the purchasing power, cultural level, prestige, and social ambitions of their various collectors. This fashion brought the ancient world vividly into the homes of the enthusiastic and demanding elites. At the same time it gave the best artists an opportunity to show off their highest technical skills in the emulation and enlargement of tiny and complicated numismatic and glyptic prototypes, with the help of the modern Donatellian *stiacciato*. The humanistic concerns of patrons and collectors, and the highest consummate mastery of marble and stone carving, converged in the work of Desiderio. The monuments and the earliest surviving documents on the new genre discussed in these pages symptomatically lead us back to him.

Proceeding from the more toward the less certain, and from the familiar to the lesser known (or even unknown), the discussion may begin with the beautiful marble half-bust *Julius Caesar* (fig. 59, cat. 14) in the Louvre. When this piece came to the museum in 1882 with the Charles Timbal collection, it had for some time been attributed to Donatello's circle and only tentatively identified as the Roman dictator. Nonetheless, most studies on the relief for nearly a century have recognized the artist as Desiderio and the subject as the effective founder of the empire. Without compromising the perfect physiognomic individuality of the hero, as immortalized in late republican iconography (a thin, beardless face; a sharp

Fig. 59
Desiderio da Settignano
Julius Caesar
marble, cut down from the original format, ca. 1460
Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. RF 572

Fig. 61
Mino da Fiesole
Alfonso the Magnanimous, King of Naples
marble, ca. 1460
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Bequest of René de Saint-Marceaux, 1915, inv. RF 1611

nose; incipient baldness; a bony physique; and a pronounced Adam's apple), Desiderio has nonetheless fully succeeded in assimilating the character into his gallery of human types. This august old man, weighed down by experience, seems to be presented to us once again in the guise of a devout and penitent hermit, kneeling at the foot of the crucifix, in the narrative relief *Saint Jerome in the Desert* in Washington (cat. 15).

The *Julius Caesar* in Paris is one of the finest and most incontrovertible examples of Desiderio's style. The meticulous, almost maniacal care taken over naturalistic details matches splendidly with our sculptor's incomparable artifice in executing the infinite gradations of the relief. The profile of the head and the perfect three-quarter foreshortening of the bust stand out with absolute purity against the neutral ground. In the withered flesh, the still fresh laurel crown, and the delicate lines of the mantle, the material pulsates, breathes, and vibrates as only certain marbles are capable of doing, and only in the hands of a few true masters. Perhaps it is no accident that a work of such quality received an exceptional mention amid the widespread critical neglect of objects of this kind in the early modern period. The *Julius Caesar* can be identified with a relief admired in 1591 by Francesco Bocchi, and again in 1677 by Giovanni Cinelli, as part of the art collection in Palazzo Valori in Borgo degli Albizzi in Florence: a "Carrara marble panel, about one braccio high, in which we can see a most beautiful head by the hand of Donatello, an image of Solon wearing a garland on his head, of marvelous facture, because in the neck the parts of nature are imitated with extreme understanding, and the face seems to be of a living and utterly natural man."[1]

Meeting the same fate as almost all Italian sculptors before Michelangelo, Desiderio fell into oblivion during the long period between the late 16th century and early 19th century. And, as always happens in progressive historical developments, the 15th-century profiles in ancient style also suffered as new aspects of taste prevailed, a taste that they themselves had helped to establish: the production and collection of profiles that were increasingly faithful to classical models both in the facial features of the subjects and the forms of their supports (the round shape of coins, the ovals of gems and cameos); and the pursuit, collection, reproduction, imitation, and falsification of ancient portraits through the more ostentatious and lifelike medium of sculpture in the round. Though threatened by such insidious competition, the profiles of the early Renaissance managed to survive, but at the cost of two sacrifices. First, due to their by then "primitive" aura, they were taken for real antiques, handed down to the latest generations of owners from an obscure and distant past; second, they were considered anonymous and "minor" antiquities, which could be freely "restored" not only by adding but also by removing features. Thus they could be altered to suit the changing criteria—first baroque, then

Fig. 60
Desiderio da Settignano
Heroic Youth (Roman Emperor?)
marble, ca. 1455, with the background partially reconstructed in the 19th century
Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris, inv. 1806

neoclassical—of the new style of installing collections. Many small rectangular Florentine panels bearing the profiles of ancient monarchs and generals were cut to form tondos or ovals,[2] or, more drastically, were cut down to extract just the effigy and remount it within or against a support made of high-quality marble or semi-precious stone (for example, porphyry, serpentine, *rosso antico*), which, through its vivid colors, brought out the whiteness of the head through contrast, as though it were an enlarged cameo.[3]

Bearing in mind these practices, which can easily be verified by visiting the oldest and most traditional sculpture collections and *antiquaria* in half of Europe, it is extraordinary that the *Julius Caesar* has maintained its original rectangular shape almost perfectly. It is equally extraordinary, and closely related to the fine physical condition of the material, that the relief was correctly perceived during the 16th and 17th centuries as a modern work. Far less surprising is its attribution to Donatello. For almost three centuries, up until the late 19th century, the greatest sculptor of the early Renaissance provided an irresistible name to attach to any well-regarded marble or bronze work executed before Michelangelo; similarly, many ancient statues and reliefs were assigned to Praxiteles or Phidias during the Middle Ages and quattrocento. This misunderstanding was particularly comprehensible in the case of Desiderio, whose style, chronology, and activity are so closely associated with the great patriarch's latest phases that even today the choice of attribution between the two masters is still not fully resolved for certain works.[4]

Fig. 62
Mino da Fiesole
Faustina the Younger, Empress
marble, ca. 1460
Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, inv. S27w77

The artistic catalogue of Desiderio's work as it has laboriously taken shape in the studies of recent decades includes a second imperial "head"—which, like that of the *Caesar*, is preserved in Paris. This is the marble panel of a young man in the Musée Jacquemart-André, assigned emphatically but not unanimously to Desiderio (fig. 60).[5] Personally, I have no problem in accepting an attribution to Desiderio, as long as a clear disjunction in date and destination between this piece and the one in the Louvre is acknowledged. The two are very different in the depth of the relief and the orientation of the face, but also in the subject's psychological demeanor and iconographic significance. The young man in the Musée Jacquemart-André is not an exact physiognomic study of an ancient Roman prince, but rather a very successful attempt to formulate an ideal type of classical heroic head, ably adopting the *Martelli Saint John* (cat. 2) as inspiration. If we return to the 16th-century Florentine tradition—in which I have always believed—that identified this *Saint John* as a work entirely or at least mostly by the hand of Donatello,[6]

Fig. 63
Mino da Fiesole
Julius Caesar
marble, ca. 1460–65
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Quincy Adams Shaw Collection, by Quincy Adams Shaw Jr and Mrs. Marian Shaw Haughton, inv. 17.1471

Fig. 64
Gregorio di Lorenzo
Emperor Nero
marble, not later than 1472
Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Barberini, Rome (reserve holdings), inv. M.A.I. 61

begun when Desiderio was little more than a boy, it follows that the figure of the young man in the Musée Jacquemart-André must be the earliest surviving classical head by Desiderio (ca. 1455, or perhaps even earlier). The *Julius Caesar*, on the other hand, seems to exemplify the final and most celebrated manner of Desiderio in this field, as we encounter it in a public, sacred setting through the Eucharistic altar in the Basilica of San Lorenzo (cat. 23).

We know that by 1455 at the latest, Desiderio was working on the 12 *teste* (heads or busts) in ancient style. This is attested by several invaluable bank documents published for the first time in 1962, but broadly interpreted only in 1979 in a monographic essay by Ulrich Middeldorf.[7] The conclusions of this pioneering work on imperial profiles sculpted in Florence have since been taken up in myriad writings on the sculpture of the Renaissance and the reception of the classical heritage. The documents show that Desiderio was in close contact with Bartolomeo di Paolo Serragli, an intriguing character who, as a dynamic and enterprising art dealer, employed some of the most fashionable painters and sculptors in Florence in the 1450s, relying for payment on the services of the Cambini bank. Since nearly all the artists paid by Serragli were well known for their relations with the Medici, the publishers of the documents (and Middeldorf as well) believed that Serragli was acting as a mediator for the family and that the works recorded in his accounts were made to decorate the famous Medici palazzo in Via Larga and other Medici residences. In particular, the 12 heads by Desiderio were to adorn the *studiolo* of Giovanni, the second son of Cosimo the Elder. To me, however, it has always seemed strange that the Medici,

Fig. 65
Desiderio da Settignano
Olympias, Queen of the Macedonians
marble, ca. 1460–64
Palacio Real, La Granja
de San Ildefonso (Segovia),
inv. 10040081 Patrimonio
Nacional

Fig. 66
Draftsman active in Spain
in the 18th century
(after Desiderio da Settignano)
Olympias, Queen of the Macedonians
black pencil on paper,
ca. 1747–52
Museo Nacional del Prado,
Madrid, *Cuaderno de Ajello,*
fol. 1r

the owners of one of the most important banking organizations in Europe and such avant-garde patrons of art that they succeeded in turning some of the most brilliant contemporary masters into virtual court artists, should have had recourse to the good offices not only of Bartolomeo Serragli but also of the Cambini bankers to obtain what was immediately available to them in Florence. Wishing to understand the matter more clearly, I returned to the original documents to discover that the "artistic entries" in Serragli's accounts are considerably more numerous than those published in 1962. The documents also revealed Serragli as an agent who continually traveled between Florence and Naples in the years following the Peace of Lodi (1454), when relations between Cosimo the Elder and his sons, on one hand, and King Alfonso the Magnanimous, on the other, were stronger and friendlier than ever before. Most of the Florentine luxury goods procured by Serragli were destined for Alfonso's court in Naples, especially for the king himself, who was also the probable client for Desiderio's heads. At the same time Serragli was supplying the Medici with authentic works of classical art and other items that the south Italian market could provide more generously than its Florentine equivalent. This profitable and exemplary circle of relationships culminated in 1456 when Serragli, aided by the Medici, managed to convince Donatello to begin work on a colossal bronze statue about which Alfonso had already approached the master while the latter was in Padua four years earlier. It was to be an equestrian monument of the king, to be placed within the upper fornix of the marble triumphal arch that served as an entrance into Castel Nuovo. Donatello modeled and cast the upper section of the animal (the famous *Carafa Head* today in the Museo Archeologico in Naples). But the slow pace of subsequent work on the statue, the unexpected move of the master to Siena in 1457, the almost simultaneous deaths of Alfonso and Serragli in 1458, and the dramatic political, military, and economic problems confronted by Alfonso's successor, Ferrante, in his efforts to retain the throne, prevented completion of the commission.

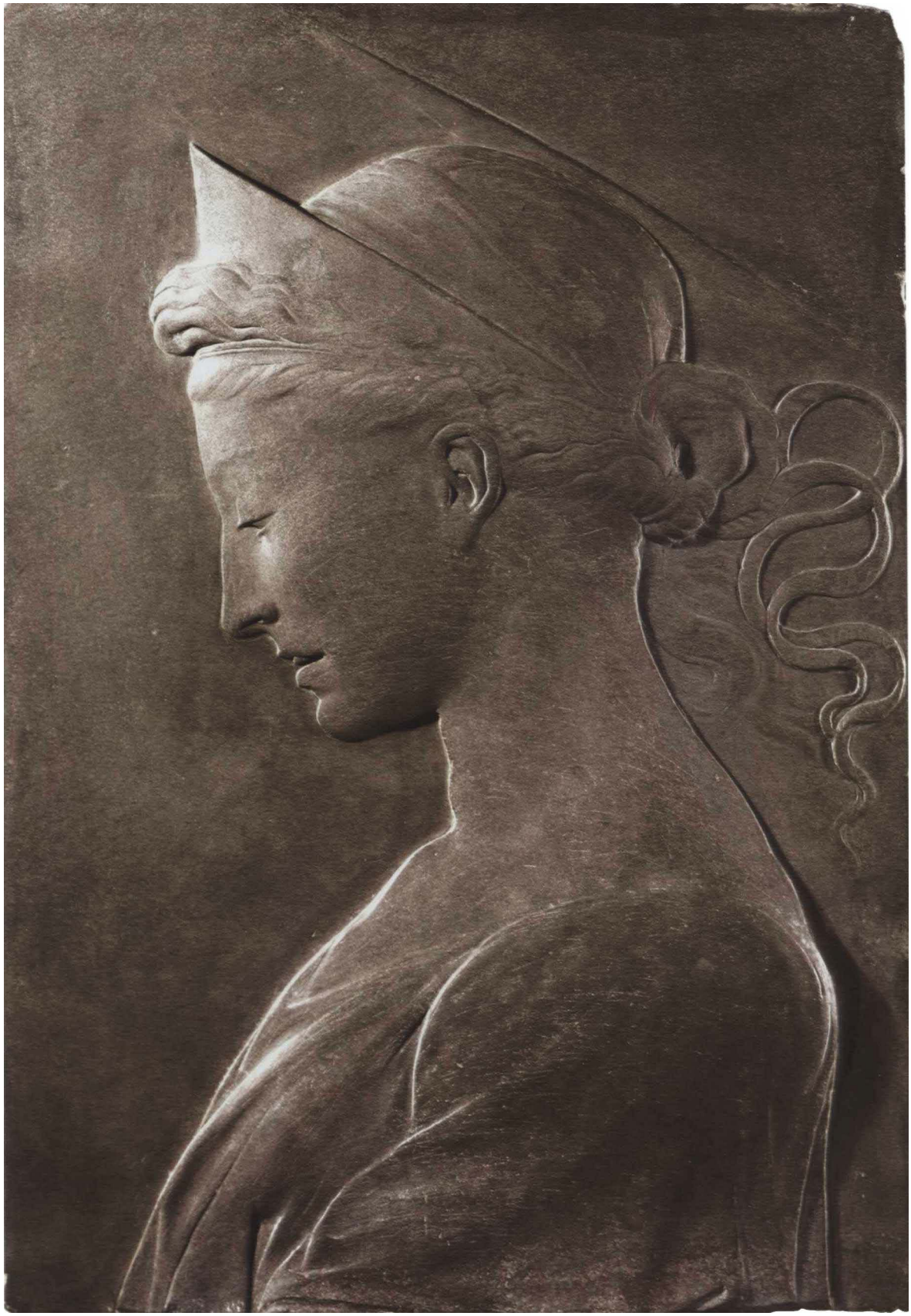
The artistic exchanges between the Medici and Aragonese during the years Desiderio worked for Naples were crucial not only to the general introduction of *all'antica* profiles, but also to the modern portrait in sculpture. It is no surprise that Mino da Fiesole, the sculptor of the first marble busts of contemporary figures to be dated with certainty (starting with *Piero di Cosimo de' Medici*, Bargello, 1453–54), traveled to Naples in 1455–56 to sculpt the king in marble. Nor is it only by chance that Mino, after Desiderio, was the most interesting and precocious sculptor of reliefs with heads of classical personalities. Mino, thanks to his long career, has left a much larger oeuvre in this genre (figs. 62, 63, 72).

A comparison of his *Julius Caesar* in Boston with Desiderio's in the Louvre (figs. 63, 59; cat. 14) is very instructive in showing how two artists with the same cultural and technical background, working with reference to the same ancient models, could formulate almost opposite approaches to characterization and style.

The production of busts in the round of contemporary figures and of reliefs with pseudo-antique profiles by both Desiderio and Mino appears inextricably intertwined with the first forms of systematic antiquarian collecting, particularly by the Medici, of marble and bronze busts, coins and engraved stones, and with the rapid development of modern portraiture on medals. While Alfonso was seeking new marble profiles from Desiderio (in compliance with the canon of Suetonius' 12 Caesars), Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici was collecting actual classical heads in the round directly for his *studiolo*, and having himself portrayed by Mino as a veritable Roman emperor, not only in format, but even in costume (1455, Bargello). Alfonso, however, had already identified himself with the Caesars through the medals Pisanello had cast for him since 1449.[8] It was very probably in homage to these noble metal models that Mino produced not only the portrait of the king in 1455–56 (which documents suggest was in the round, and therefore lost) but also the penetrating and memorable profile in the Louvre (fig. 61), perhaps originally part of a cycle of *viri illustres*.

The remarkable consequences of the contacts between the Medici and Aragonese involving sculpture *all'antica*, even after the deaths in close succession of Alfonso (1458), Desiderio and Cosimo the Elder (both 1464), and Donatello (1466), are demonstrated, among other things, by the fate of the *Carafa Protome*. This was sent in 1471 by Lorenzo the Magnificent—who must have reclaimed it from among the works remaining in Donatello's workshop—to Diomede Carafa, Count of Maddaloni, who was King Ferrante's right-hand man and a great lover of such relics. The following year the Florentine sculptor Gregorio di Lorenzo (ca. 1436–1504) traveled to Naples to deliver a series of 12 marble Caesars. Middeldorf was aware that Gregorio was the same man as the "Chiricho di Lorenzo" or "Ghirighoro" recorded in Serragli's accounts as a pupil and assistant to Desiderio more than 15 years earlier when the master sculpted his heads (which prompts the question whether the cycle delivered to Naples in 1472 was the completion of the series begun by Desiderio and perhaps, like Donatello's statue of Alfonso, never finished). Recently discovered documentation has revealed Gregorio as a specialist in imperial profiles with his own style: he executed another series of 12 Caesars in marble that, significantly, was delivered in the same year to the Este court in Ferrara at the time of the wedding celebration for Duke Ercole and Princess Eleonora, a daughter of Ferrante. This discovery has resulted in the attribution to him of not only the *Agrippa* and *Antoninus Pius* in the Museo di Casa Romei (the only remnants of the Estense cycle still in Ferrara),[9] but also various similar reliefs in public and private collections around the world, some of them no longer in their rectangular form like the Casa Romei pieces but cut out around the profiles and set against colored grounds. As certain subjects occur twice amongst these sculptures, it is clear that some of these heads were originally part of the Aragonese series (in the Cleveland Museum of Art there is another *Antoninus Pius*; Nero appears in two

Fig. 67
Desiderio da Settignano
Saint Helen, Empress, previously known as *Saint Cecilia*
pietra serena, ca. 1460–64
Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio, Acquired with the funds of the Libbey Foundation, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, inv. 1938.122



versions—one cut out and formerly in the Guggenheim Collection in Venice, and an integral, unpublished example in storage at the Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Barberini in Rome, fig. 64). The renewed critical attention to such objects, and other fortunate connections between documents and surviving works (for instance, the lavabo in the vestibule of the sacristy in the Badia in Fiesole, 1461–62), has allowed Gregorio to be identified with certainty as the controversial and elusive Master of the Marble Madonnas, an artist previously often considered Lombard and younger by one or two generations than was actually the case.[10]

Returning to Desiderio, and passing from male to female subjects, the focus can now be shifted to a relief that ranks with *Julius Caesar* as the finest and most fascinating work of this kind, a relief that has also miraculously survived with its original rectangular ground. I refer to the *Olympias, Queen of the Macedonians*, preserved in Spain in the palace of La Granja de San Ildefonso (fig. 65) where, to my knowledge, it has remained unmentioned by literature on Italian sculpture of the quattrocento, being easily confused with the various antiquities at that royal site. When I first presented the work at a conference in Washington in February 2003, I thought that the style and quality would speak for themselves; consequently, owing to a shortage of time, I made no mention of the series of written and pictorial references made to it during the 17th and 18th centuries. This omission at first led some of my colleagues—who were evidently much struck by the similarity of this piece to the so-called *Saint Cecilia* in the Toledo Museum of Art in Ohio (fig. 67), a work whose authenticity has been much doubted in recent decades—to suggest privately that the *Olympias*, too, was not genuine. Personally, I am unaware of any 19th-century fake that rises to such a vertiginous summit of grace, in the caressing cut of the marble, carried almost to alabastrine extremes. Nor do I know of any sculptural forgeries, however brilliant, that are so deeply immersed in the style of the artist they strive to counterfeit.

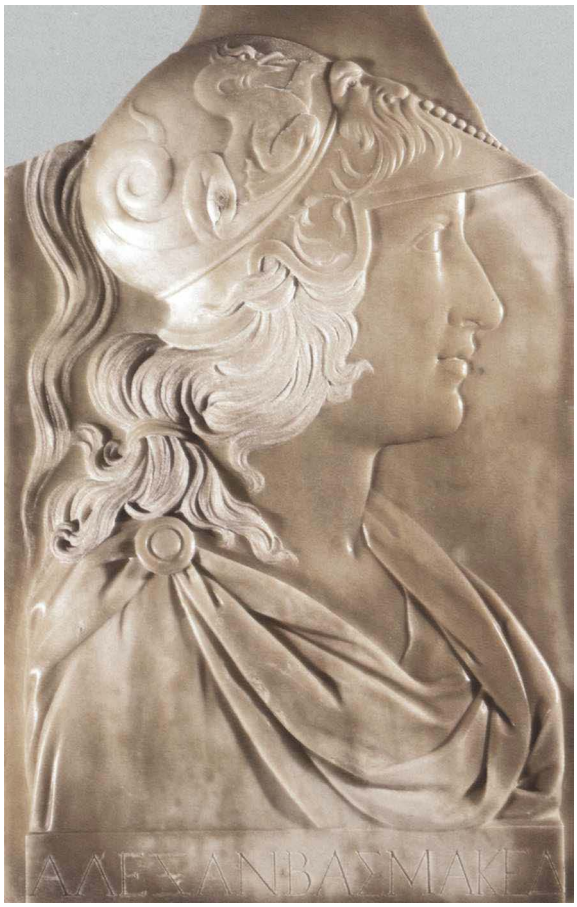
Fig. 68
Filippo Collino (after an ancient model)
Alexander the Great
marble, 1756
Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici ed il Paesaggio del Piemonte, Turin, inv. SM 660

In spite of the almost fanatical delicacy of the material and the uniformity of its whiteness, the mother of Alexander the Great asserts herself with force above the impeccably realized lower border with its epigraph (whose characters we already know from the epitaph of Carlo Marsuppini in Santa Croce; cat. 1). The ample bosom seems to draw slightly panting breath under the gossamer veil; the neck rises in sublime hauteur; the pensive profile stands forth, impervious to time, against the neutral ground; and her refined coiffure abounds with astonishing inventions freely lifted from the most precious carved gems: the diadem set low on her forehead, the sharply defined ribbons and bands hanging loose with studied negligence, and the crown of laurel with leaves rising fanlike at the front, almost as though they were made of silk or organdy. And the small tuft of eyelashes projecting in a single delicate stroke from the upper eyelid is an inimitable Morellian indication of the hand of Desiderio.

Fig. 69
Filippo Collino
(after Desiderio da Settignano)
Olympias, Queen of the Macedonians
marble, 1756
Soprintendenza per i Beni Architettonici ed il Paesaggio del Piemonte, Turin, inv. SM 601

It is significant that two and a half centuries ago the timeless magnificence of this panel inspired the choice of the *Olympias* as the frontispiece to the *Cuaderno de Ajello* (Prado, Madrid; fig. 66), an album of drawings compiled between 1747 and 1752 to illustrate the collection of antiques belonging to Elisabetta Farnese, queen of Spain, of which the *Olympias* was then a part (as is attested not only by the *Cuaderno*, but by the Bourbon inventories, by repeated published descriptions of the palace, and by the small lily engraved in the upper left corner of the lower border).[11] A few years later, in 1756, the *Olympias* in La Granja, or more probably a faithful cast taken from it that had remained in Italy, was used as a model by the sculptor Filippo Collino (Turin, ca. 1737–1800), who was then working in Rome, for a relief (without the epigraph) to be sent to the Savoyard court together with an analogous piece (also without an epigraph) with the effigy of Alexander the Great (figs. 68, 69).[12] Almost inevitably Collino chose the more modern oval shape for both profiles, which was then repeated in replicas of the same pair made in Piedmont. Two of these were marble medallions (which included epigraphs of the names of the Macedonian figures) that arrived in the Russian court before 1790, the year in which they were documented in Pavlovsk Palace (where they remain, attributed to Ignazio Collino, Filippo's brother) in the boudoir of Grand Duchess Maria Feodorovna, who later became czarina.[13]

That the *Olympias* may have faced an *Alexander the Great* looking toward the right is a reasonable hypothesis even for Desiderio's time. The Macedonian hero is recorded as a subject for this type of sculpture at least by the time of Verrocchio, who, according to Giorgio Vasari, produced an *Alexander* and a *Darius* that were presented by Lorenzo the Magnificent to Matthias Corvinus, king of Hungary. Desiderio's *Olympias* at La Granja is accompanied by a relief of identical dimensions representing her son (fig. 70), which, like the *Olympias*, is considered by the curators of the Patrimonio Nacional to be an anonymous work of the late Italian quattrocento.[14] The latter relief in La Granja was almost certainly made to be hung as a pair with the former, yet the contrast between the two is striking, and the *Alexander*, while of rather modest quality, appears at the same time more advanced from a philological standpoint. The head is a faithful copy of prototypes on ancient coins and carved gems and the epigraphic border is sculpted with Greek letters, but the general's clumsily arranged cloak is an invention of the unknown sculptor, who clearly had to make up for the lack of a model when he was asked to match the shape and size of the bust to that of the *Olympias*. If, as the Spanish authorities believe, the *Olympias* passed through the Roman collection of Christina Alexandra of Sweden († 1689), then the period and the patronage of this queen, who shared more than her name with the Macedonian leader, would provide



an explanation for the execution of the *Alexander*, devised as a pendant to Desiderio's *Olympias* even in the style of the epigraph. These circumstances would also clarify why the *Olympias*, which was later moved to Castile, was still known in Rome at the time of Collino.* Among the minor pieces from the former Foulc collection of Paris, now in storage at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, is another replica of the *Olympias*, which, to judge by its execution, might well be a 17th-century Italian work (fig. 71). It is faithful to the model even in its dimensions, except for the absence of the inscribed lower section (which explains the current identification as a *Ceres*). The fidelity of the reproduction goes hand-in-hand with the extraordinary respect for the rectangular format accorded to the Granja relief during the 17th and 18th centuries, so great that the *Alexander* with Greek letters was required to conform to it.

I have already alluded to the remarkable stylistic similarity between the *Olympias* and the so-called *Saint Cecilia* in Toledo (fig. 67), a work that was as much admired in the 19th century (as a masterpiece by Donatello of course) as it is chattered about today (though very few experts have actually taken the trouble to go and see it). Far from casting a shadow over the *Olympias*, the links between these two panels invite us to rehabilitate the Toledo relief to its full value. Technically and materially, the *Saint Cecilia* suffers from two serious disadvantages that must be taken into consideration: first, the sculptor has ambitiously attempted to re-create in *pietra serena* the same extreme

Fig. 70
Sculptor active in Rome in the second half of the 17th century (or more likely in Spain in the second half of the 18th century)
Alexander the Great
marble
Palacio Real, La Granja de San Ildefonso (Segovia), inv. 10138286 Patrimonio Nacional

Fig. 71
Sculptor active in Rome in the second half of the 17th century (after Desiderio da Settignano)
Olympias, Queen of the Macedonians
marble
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, Acquired from the Edmond Foulc Collection using museum funds in 1930 (reserve holdings), inv. 30-1-78

Fig. 72
Mino da Fiesole
Saint Helen, Empress
marble, ca. 1465–70
Musée Calvet, Avignon,
inv. N 141

refinements possible in Carrara marble, but by its very nature the stone resists such sensitivity; second, as pointed out by Middeldorf (who was one of the few to examine the work directly while it still belonged to the collection of the Earls of Wemyss in Great Britain, as well as after its departure for the United States in 1937), the relief, which had been covered by a layer of dirt, was subjected to a ruthless cleaning, as were many of the sculptures that passed through the hands of the famous antique dealer Joseph Duveen.[15] If I dwell on the Toledo relief, it is not just to pronounce on any piece by Desiderio, but because I believe that it, too, fully deserves to be included in these pages. In my opinion, one of the principal reasons why doubts exist about this work is its very unusual iconography: the figure is undeniably a saint because of her halo, but the image seems scarcely sacred and even less devotional, carved in profile rather than facing toward us. Moreover, in addition to the halo, she wears a diadem, which makes her even rarer and invalidates the 19th-century identification as the patron

saint of music. It was suggested by the half-open mouth, but at a time when knowledge had long since faded that many of Desiderio's figures, in emulation of the *Martelli Saint John*, shared this characteristic. Other identifications proposed since the late 19th century include Saint Catherine of Alexandria (because of the diadem she wears) and (because of the profile) the Virgin listening to an imaginary archangel to our left during the Annunciation. Understandably, neither hypothesis has met with much support from scholars. It seems to me that a succinct and complete solution can be found if we recognize the figure as a *Saint Helen, Empress*, and the panel as an example of the genre of imperial effigies. In addition to its horizontal truncation, the presentation in profile, the diadem, and the band with ribbons fluttering behind her neck, other characteristic features of this fashion are the dimensions (54.5 × 37.5 cm) and the use of *pietra serena* (as, for example, in the reliefs of the Empress Faustina the Elder and her daughter Faustina the Younger, both close to the work of Gregorio di Lorenzo, respectively in the Louvre and Musée Jacquemart-André[16]). A relief by Mino da Fiesole preserved in the Musée Calvet in Avignon since 1849 (fig. 72) provides confirmation that Helen fits perfectly into this genre, perhaps as a pendant with her son Constantine the Great. In imitation of the work of Desiderio, the figure in Avignon even has half-open lips, a trait that was not common in Mino's imperial heads.

If compared with the other profiles discussed in these pages, the dress of the saint in Toledo does seem to be more modern, and thus may have been one of the reasons for suspicions, though they have never really been explained in detail. Everything suggests, however, that by making reference to the fashions of his time and including a halo, Desiderio wished to allude to the fact that Helen, though she was rightly a member of the long and glorious line of classical female sovereigns, was also set apart from them by having become a Christian, thus opening the way to the new era.[17] Following the master's example, a sculptor in his circle depicted another ancient saint-princess in contemporary clothing, Constance, reportedly the daughter of Dorotheus, king of Constantinople, and a martyr-companion of Saint Ursula. It is telling that the wooden bust in the Louvre to which I am referring, traditionally regarded as the portrait of a 15th-century lady and thus called the *Belle Florentine*, was also suspected of being a forgery until a very recent restoration revealed the original epigraph with the name of the heroine beneath repaintings (cat. 8).

When the Toledo relief was published for the first time (1854), a provenance from Palazzo Brunaccini Compagni in Florence was adduced. This proposition also raised questions (the name Compagni was often also transformed into Campagni or Compagna), for the most part because no palace is known by that name today. Middeldorf, who had a particularly well-founded faith in the authenticity of the work, wondered whether the building might have been the one that is today known as Palazzo Marucelli Fenzi.[18] His question can now be decisively answered in the affirmative, based on the many guides and chronicles of Florence from the Napoleonic and Restoration periods. Palazzo Castelli in Via San Gallo, made particularly famous and sumptuous by the Marucelli who took ownership in 1659, passed from the last male of the line

to Jacopo Brunaccini, his cousin, in 1783. Jacopo's only daughter and heir, Giovanna, married Ottaviano Compagni, and the palazzo was known by their two surnames until 1829 when it was sold to the Fenzi bankers, who restored it to a central place in the city's social life.[19] This is as far as my research takes us at present: all that is left to do is to find the *Saint Helen* among the many surviving documents relating to the history of the palazzo.[20]

In this essay I present some of the topics, though in summary form and a different order, that I discussed at the conference "Collecting Sculpture in Early Modern Europe" held in February 2003 at the CASVA, National Gallery of Art, Washington. While waiting for the proceedings to be published, my paper (*Fifteenth-Century Reliefs of Ancient Emperors and Empresses in Florence: Production and Collecting*) has been circulated, thanks to the typescript handed out to the audience. To keep this text short, the notes have been reduced to the minimum, and for the most part tacitly refer to the detailed version that will appear in the proceedings of the 2003 conference (as is also true of the bibliography). I take this opportunity to thank those friends to whom I owe my first knowledge of some of the pieces I have investigated: in particular, Davide Gasparotto (for La Granja), Tomaso Montanari (for La Granja and Turin), and Eike Schmidt (for Pavlovsk).

1. Un "quadro di marmo carrarese circa un braccio lungo, ci ha una bellissima testa di mano di Donatello effigiata per un Solone con ghirlanda in capo, di maraviglioso artifizio, perché nel collo sono imitate con estremo sapere le parti di natura, et il volto sembra che sia huom vivo et veramente naturale," Bocchi 1591, p. 181; Cinelli 1677, p. 364.

2. This is the case with a *Faustina the Younger* by Mino da Fiesole in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (in storage) and a warrior in the style of Verrocchio in a private collection published by Annamaria Giusti in Memphis (Giusti 2004, pp. 82–83), (might this be a *Hannibal* rather than an *Alexander the Great*?).

3. I am thinking of a *Julio-Claudian Prince* by Mino da Fiesole, unpublished, South Portico, Belvedere Octagonal Courtyard, Pio-Clementino Museum, Vatican City.

4. I recall just one example, the *Del Pugliese Dudley Madonna* by Donatello (ca. 1440) in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, which was believed until 1992, and also after, to be a masterpiece by Desiderio: Caglioti, in exh. cat. Florence 1992-1, pp. 72–78, no. 15.

5. Inv. 1806. For all, see La Moureyre-Gavoty 1975, no. 33 (with bibl.). The rectangular ground, though certainly present originally, now includes some 19th-century integrations. It is not clear if it was broken in the meantime or if it was given a different format to conform to the new fashion mentioned in the previous paragraph.

6. See the essay by Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi in this catalogue (with bibl.).

7. Middeldorf 1979.

8. Hill 1930, nos. 41–43.

9. Rosenberg 1997, p. 114 and note 37 (pp. 246–47), p. 117 figs. 41–42.

10. While awaiting publication of the CASVA proceedings, see Pisani 2003, and Caglioti 2004, passim, especially pp. 58–62 and notes 68–80 (pp. 76–77).

11. San Ildefonso exh. cat. 2000, pp. 435–37 nos. 6.5–6.6 (Riaza de los Mozos and Simal López), with bibl. In the 19th century, when even the most erudite Spaniards had lost sight of the *Olympias*, the frontispiece of the *Cuaderno* was believed to be an ideal portrait of Elisabetta Farnese.

12. Di Macco, in Milan exh. cat. 2002, p. 106 figs. V.4-V.5, pp. 431–32 nos. V.4–V.5 (who did not consider the possibility that the work might have been modeled on a 15th-century work), with bibl.

13. Ducamp 1993, p. 86 figs. 32–33, p. 217 nos. 32–33 (inv. 992-VIII and 993-VIII).

14. San Ildefonso exh. cat. 2000, pp. 423–24 no. 5.26, pp. 422–23 no. 5.25 (M.J. Herrero).

15. Middeldorf 1979, note 23. On Duveen and the cleaning of sculpture, see Luchs 1990.

16. Vitry 1922, p. 82 no. 671 (inv. Campana 13); La Moureyre-Gavoty 1975, no. 66 (inv. 1981).

17. Among the sandstone profiles of women by Desiderio or his followers mistakenly believed to be fakes during the 20th century (in particular by Pope-Hennessy 1974), besides the *Saint* in Toledo and the *Young Woman* ("*Ford or Valori Lady*") in Detroit—the latter rehabilitated in recent years (Darr, in Darr, Barnet, Boström 2002, I, pp. 105–9 no. 55, with bibl.)—there is a relief from the Berlin Museums (Schottmüller 1913, pp. 58–59 no. 134) similar in style to the two *Faustinas* in Paris mentioned in the text. Whereas the head of the woman is comparable to that of the "*Valori Lady*" (an autograph work by Desiderio), the bust is a faithful replica of the Granja *Olympias*: an impossible combination for any 19th-century forger, unless he was endowed with highly specialized knowledge and divinatory powers that gave him immediate access to the following century and a half of research and studies.

18. Middeldorf 1940, note 2.

19. For all, see Bigazzi, Ciuffoletti 2002, passim.

20. See Bigazzi, Ciuffoletti 2002 for a useful though very limited sample of the surviving papers.

* After the French edition of this catalogue went to press, a new publication presented the discovery that the *Olympias* relief came to Queen Elisabetta Farnese from Rome in 1738, along with other gifts of works of art, from Luis Antonio de Belluga y Moncada, a Spanish cardinal resident at the Curia. See Mercedes Simal López, "Isabel de Farnesio y la colleción real espanõl de escultura. Distintas noticias sobre compras, regalos, restauraciones y el encargo del 'Cuaderno de Aiello,'" *Archivo español de arte*, 79, 2006, 315 (July–September), pp. 263–78, especially pp. 269 and note 30, 270 fig. 3.

DESIDERIO AND FLORENCE IN THE 19TH CENTURY: STAGE SET OF A MYTH

Andrea Baldinotti

In 1904, after much delay and difficulty, the monument to Desiderio by its sculptor Vittorio Caradossi[1] (fig. 73) was unveiled on the hill in Settignano. It had, however, already achieved a high degree of celebrity: four years after being presented in Florence in 1896, the plaster model for the work had been awarded a coveted silver medal at the Exposition Universelle in Paris.

Standing, in his heavy work smock with a subtly defiant expression on his face, Desiderio gazes toward Florence on the horizon below. His left hand grasps his chisel, his right, armed with a hammer, rests on a large block of marble on the front face of which is the cleanly defined image of the *Madonna and Child* destined for the lunette of the Marsuppini tomb in Santa Croce. Along the uneven edge of the block, Caradossi left quite visible the marks of the claw chisel and stonecutter's point. Such details were not arbitrary but are part of an ideological concept of craftsmanship: the extraordinary refinement Desiderio had achieved in his working of marble flowed directly from an impassioned and indefatigable daily labor that, in the guise of an artistic ability that had since become legendary, was successfully taken up by the craftsmen and artists of modern Florence.

The monument to Desiderio set a final seal of approval on a myth that had steadily increased during the 19th century, culminating in its final years with a veneration for images of untroubled beauty.[2] It is no coincidence that the commemorative inscription[3] was requested from one of the most distinguished visitors of which the township of Settignano was able to boast: Gabriele d'Annunzio. The Abruzzese poet had settled there six years before, having rented Villa della Capponcina, a house whose interior decor he had, as usual, not hesitated to transform completely—as a tribute to the locality and in accordance with his renewed interest in 15th-century Tuscan art and literature—as an evocation of the magnificence of the daily life of true a Renaissance lord.[4]

It was both a home and a private stage on which his inimitable life was played out in secret, day after day. A mirror that furnished an indecipherable reflection of a mythography in perennial construction, the villa had begun to be occupied by mysterious presences, destined in time to become, in D'Annunzio's eyes, witnesses and faithful companions during his moments of artistic inspiration. Busts of famous figures of the Florentine Renaissance, perfect terracotta replicas made by the Manifattura di Signa[5] (fig. 74), faced one another above the mantelpieces of the fireplaces, or gazed out, fully worthy, in their opaline whiteness, of the originals, from the tranquil semidarkness of the rooms where intellectual idleness sought sustenance from the harmony of music or profound reverie.

Fig. 73
Vittorio Caradossi
Desiderio da Settignano, 1904
Florence City Council, Settignano

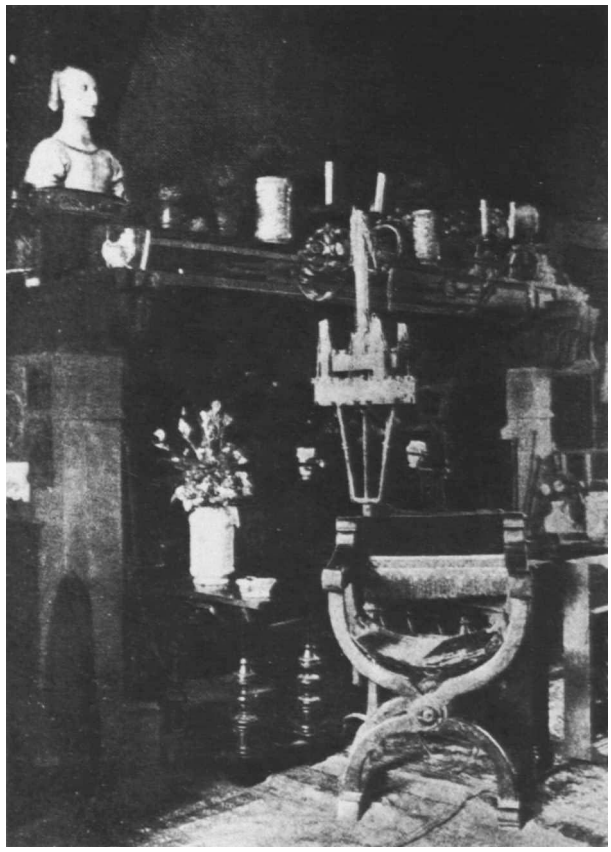


Fig. 74
Illustrated Catalogue of the Manifattura di Signa
ca. 1900–1905
pl. XLIV

Fig. 75
Photograph of the Refectory.
1903
La Capponcina, Settignano

Many of the originals of these busts were created by Desiderio: for example, the so-called *Marietta Strozzi*, which a photograph of 1903 shows, apparently in a polychrome version, in the villa's entrance hall or "refectory" (fig. 75). Moreover, it was Desiderio's star that seems to have presided over the passage of these contented years. Between 1898 and 1904 his name often appears at the foot of poetic compositions or on sheets of D'Annunzio's correspondence, endowing with unexpected harmony the very name of the place where the sculptor had been born. Thus Settignano became, in his literary fiction, Settignano di Desiderio, and the spirit of a place that obliged its greatest sons to breathe marble dust from their infancy became inextricably intertwined with the language of the one who, in Vasari's words, had successfully imparted, more than any other sculptor of his time, "very great grace and loveliness to the heads"[6] of his pallid marble creatures.

These words of Vasari's were ones over which D'Annunzio must have meditated at length. In his *Sogno d'un mattino di primavera*, a one-act play written by the poet in 1897, he attributed a key role to a bust by Desiderio: that of embodying—in the guise of Madonna Dianora, who had been murdered by her jealous husband in the ancient Villa dell'Armiranda, where the action now took place—a sort of "double" of Isabella, the protagonist, who had been driven mad by the consequences of another vicious crime. For an entire night, until she was completely covered with his blood, the woman had embraced the lifeless body of her young lover who had been slaughtered by her husband before her eyes. The only comfort Isabella found, in her pain and

solitude, was to see herself reflected on occasion in the silent splendor of the face of Dianora, carved in "a marble so delicate and golden" that it seemed "almost petrified honey" and "wholly swathed in sleek hair, as though in a shell, down to her chin, hair... enclosed in a woven net."[7]

D'Annunzio's universe, with its refined and evocative interiors, had in fact become suffused with those aesthetic ideals devoted to a conscious and emotionally stirring recovery of the Renaissance world—ideals that had profoundly marked the face and spirit of Florence since the first decades of the 19th century. The city of Arnolfo and Brunelleschi—a city remote from the one that would serve as the capital of Italy, but all the same frequented and celebrated by educated and cosmopolitan international visitors, the readers of the books of Michelet, Burckhardt, and Pater—had gradually become the focus "of impassioned imitation and of artistic and literary transformation, thereby nourishing the myth of a city alive in the present almost purely by dint of its noble past."[8] Against the background of the great architectural projects that clad the bare facades of the city's ancient basilicas with white Carrara marble, fresh impetus was given to the happy marriage of technical knowledge and daily artistic practice. At the same time, this nurtured the desire to keep the vital nucleus intact through the creation of new schools of drawing and art, as well as through plans for new museums or for the expansion of the city's existing institutions.

For example, at the construction site of Santa Croce, generations of sculptors, carvers, decorators, and marble workers would have tackled a decidedly ambitious monumental, artistic, and historic project with the same enthusiasm as medieval and Renaissance guilds. The renewed interest that was applied toward every form of rich, variegated ornamentation—which, as in the past, harmoniously complemented the large architectural surfaces—encouraged fresh consideration of what it was that the historiographic sources and critics early in the century had recognized in the best of Donatello's pupils—that is, in Desiderio da Settignano, for whom, as early as 1816, Leopoldo Cicognara had been so full of praise, primarily for the "extreme ... beauty of [his] ornamentation."[9]

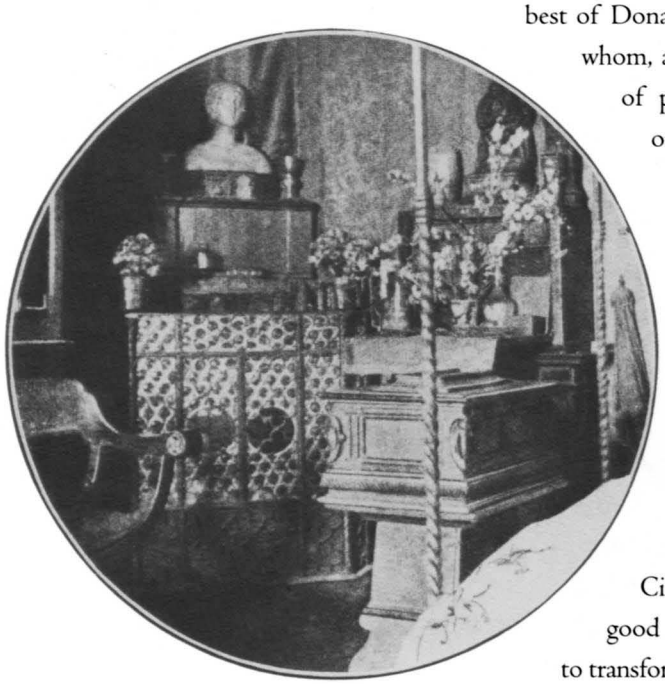


Fig. 76
Photograph of the Bedroom of Eleonora Duse with a Cast of a Bust by Francesco Laurana, 1903
La Capponcina, Settignano

However, throughout the century, knowledge of the master's art was to remain fairly vague, in particular with regard to his work on small, low reliefs and his portraiture.[10] With the exception of those sculptures explicitly mentioned in Vasari, such as the Marsuppini monument (cat. 1) and the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo* (cat. 23), much of Desiderio's work was doomed to be absorbed in the oeuvre of Donatello. In this sense, it was "above all," as Giancarlo Gentilini recalls, "the 'refined' (*gentile*) naturalism emphasized by Cicognara in the putti and women of Donatello, which a good many of the critics of the Romantic period were ready to transform from *gentilezza* into a yet more improbable 'gracefulness'

(*lezziadria*), that very soon led to a new interpretation of Donatello's art, and thus brought about further confusion regarding the attribution of works by the most delicate 15th-century artists, such as Desiderio, Antonio Rossellino, Mino da Fiesole, and Verrocchio."[11] Thus, though intending to acquire examples of the work of the father of Florentine Renaissance sculpture, many Italian and Anglo-Saxon collections had by the close of the 18th century obtained pieces that today tend to be attributed to the hand of the master from Settignano or his close circle, for example, the reliefs of the *Young Saint John* (cat. 13) in the Bargello in Florence and in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.[12]

After images of the Madonna and Child, it was those of the Child Jesus and the Infant Saint John that met with the greatest public favor. In accordance with the principles of the by then widespread movement of artistic Christian *Purismo*, the public recognized Desiderio, along with Luca della Robbia and Mino da Fiesole, as among the greatest exponents of 15th-century sacred art. The diffusion of plaster copies, for educational or critical purposes, derived from a very rich and varied iconographic repertoire, consequently increased substantially, certainly after the middle years of the century.[13] Supported by the commercial aims of an increasingly active art market, acquisitions of original works from the Florentine quattrocento by large museums such as that of South Kensington in London, the Louvre in Paris, and the Bargello in Florence were followed in those decades by constant requests to take casts of the most famous works from that unique artistic period.[14]

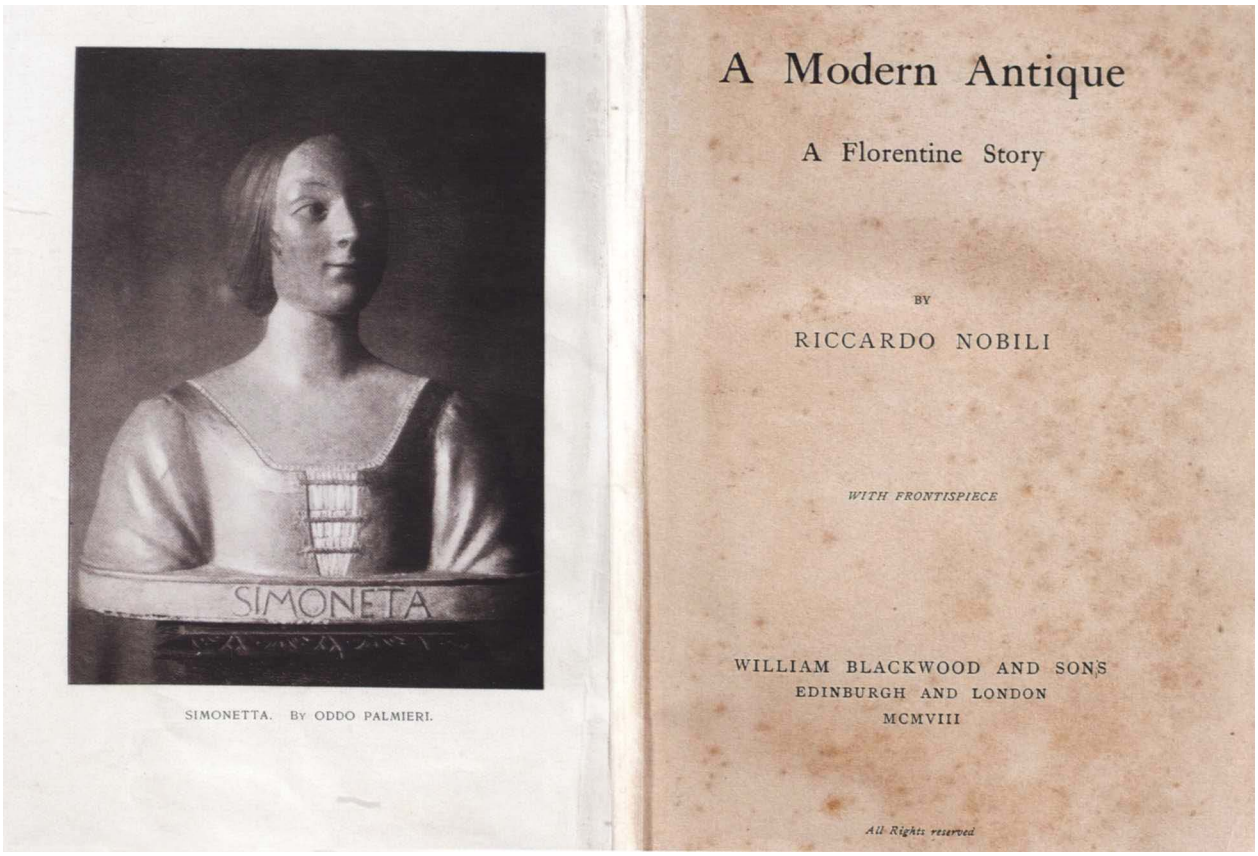
Fig. 77
Francesco Laurana (attributed to)
Bust of a Woman
marble, ca. 1484–96
Musée du Louvre, Paris.
inv. MR 2597

Fig. 78
Giovanni Bastianini
Young Woman (Aloysia Strozzi)
ca. 1855
Galleria d'Arte Moderna,
Florence

The practice of replicating renowned local sculptures by great masters had deep roots in Florence. It was not alien to either the ideology of *Purismo*, which placed great emphasis on content, or to the typical outlook of Tuscany during the Restoration, when art had so often been promoted as a luxury craft. Thus, following the practice that had begun in the studio of Lorenzo Bartolini (1777–1850), Tuscan sculptors were regularly asked to reproduce 15th-century works, whether as imitations or outright fakes. Pieces by Desiderio, even though they were still considered within Donatello's oeuvre, were among the works most exploited in the process.

These were the circumstances that encouraged a real business to develop in the creation of imitation 15th-century works by a large group of artists, some of whom, like Vincenzo Consani (1818–87) and Salvino Salvini (1824–99), also boasted a considerable interest in the field of collecting. Today, the names of Odoardo Fantacchiotti (1809–77),[15] Emilio Santarelli (1808–86),[16] Giovanni Collina (1820–93),[17] Ottavio Giovannozzi (1767–1853),[18] and, above all, Giovanni Bastianini (1830–68)[19] are not known simply on account of the fame of the original artist whose works they imitated. The pieces that they produced with sublime technical skill rivaled the most famous prototypes from the past and have themselves gained in distinction as interest has increased in the artistic careers of their creators, as well as from the gradual (and now complete) acceptance of the fake as a subject for museum display (fig. 78).

Fig. 79
Riccardo Nobili (after)
A Modern Antique: A Florentine Story,
Edinburgh and London, 1908



The man for such times, one who unscrupulously directed artisanal skills for purposes of imitation by, among others, the ceramic firm Manifattura Ginora, was Giovanni Freppa, the "king of the antiquarians" and the undoubted employer of Bastianini. From what we might today consider as a managerial standpoint, Freppa was farsighted. He strongly emphasized the importance of production techniques of 15th-century sculpture, which exhibitions of his own period—whose subject was the merger of fine art and industrial production (for example, the 1865 exhibition in Paris)—had brought forcefully into the limelight.

The industry of cast-making often relied upon mass production and consequently imposed limits on the quality of works by local producers.[20] Only the Ginori and Cantagalli factories and the Manifattura di Signa succeeded in supplying a European market thanks to a surprising capacity to reproduce all the allure, even to the nuanced patinas, of the classical and Renaissance works available in their catalogues. The eternal beauty of Desiderio's noblewomen and children, which in accordance with Pre-Raphaelite misconceptions were sometimes veiled with splendid polychromy, could now be bought and admired for a moderate price. His images of the Madonna and Child would have been installed in an increasing number of aristocratic residences as well as in the more modest homes of the middle class. These works were mute and discreet sentinels of a Florence that seemed to want to remain forever linked to its Golden Age, forgetting completely the diaspora of its painted panels and original marbles that, centuries earlier, had been its voice and its heart.

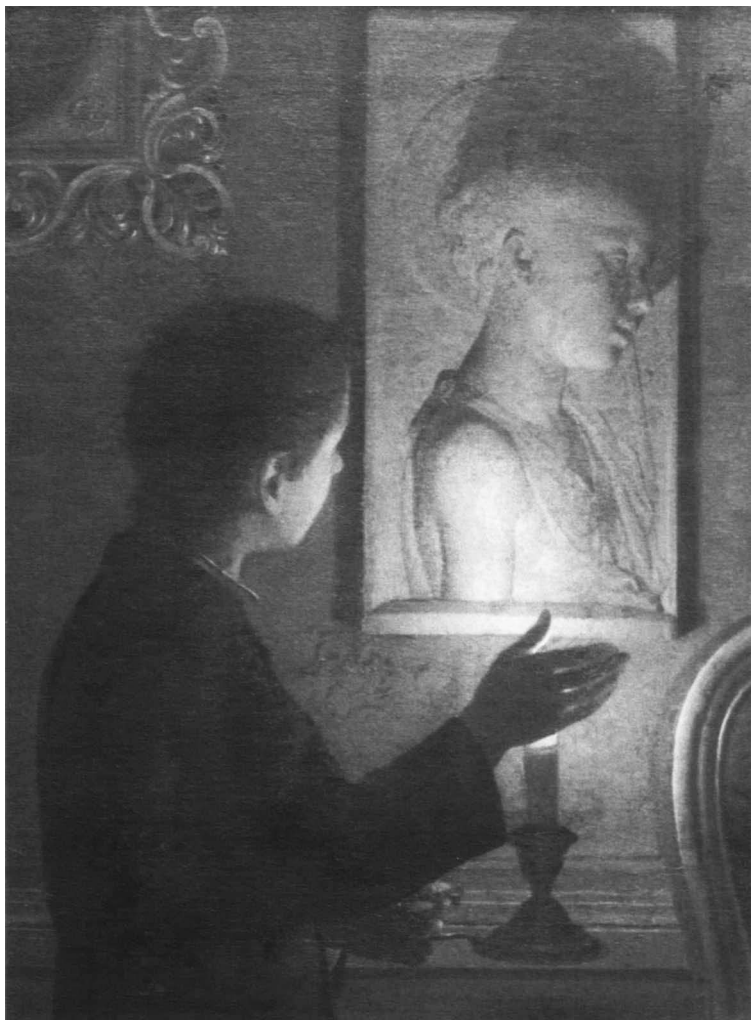


Fig. 80
Giuseppe Pierotti
Child Contemplating the Bust of the Young Saint John the Baptist by Candlelight
oil on canvas, ca. 1890
Accademia di Belle Arti, Carrara, inv. 48

1. On Vittorio Caradossi (Sesto Fiorentino 1861–Florence 1918), a sculptor who trained under Augusto Rivalta at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Florence, see in particular Torressi 2000, p. 43; Panzetta 2003, I, p. 200; Salvagnini 2005, pp. 37–42.

2. For his volumes on the sculpture of Florence (1897–1900), Marcel Reymond opened his entry on Desiderio da Settignano as follows: "*Elève de Donatello, il tient de ce maître une science impeccable, le sentiment des riches décorations, un amour tout particulier pour l'étude des petits enfants et cette technique si spéciale qui consiste à traiter les surfaces avec des reliefs très peu accentués. De Donatello, toutefois, il se sépare par la nature intime de sa pensée. Son âme, moins puissante, moins préoccupée par la recherche de l'expression dramatique, est plus tendre et semble ne connaître que les sourires de la vie. Pas un nuage, pas un inquiétude ne viennent troubler la sérénité de cet art qui est bien vraiment le plus délicat et le plus souriant que Florence ait connu*" (Reymond 1899, III, p. 63).

3. "To Desiderio, born on the gentle hill to Meo the stone-dresser, but divinely gifted by the Graces, the people of Settignano raise this marble to commemorate ancient virtue and as an auspicious sign of new life. AD MCMIV" (*A Desiderio, nato sul colle armonioso da Meo scarpellatore, ma divinamente nudrito dale Grazie, il popolo di Settignano alza questo marmo per documento della virtù antica e per segno augurale di vita novella. AD MCMIV*).

4. Baldinotti 1986, I, pp. 99–116.

5. On the history of the Manifattura di Signa, founded by the brothers Angelo and Camillo Bondi in 1895, and active, with various vicissitudes, until just after the war, see Bassignana 1986, I, pp. 3–20.

6. "Grazia grandissima e leggiadria nelle teste," Vasari-Chastel 1983, III, pp. 399–400.

7. D'Annunzio, 1939, I, p. 23. The terracotta Signa copy of the bust described by D'Annunzio, which can be identified in the Lauranesque portrait today in the Louvre (fig. 77, inv. MR 2597; Kruft 1995, p. 157, figs. 125–28; Damianaki 2000, pp. 92–96, figs. 145–49, 164, 166) stood in the room used by Eleonora Duse (fig. 76), the great tragedian who was at that time D'Annunzio's lover and who provided the first voice and spirit to the madness of Isabella. A curious reflection of the fascinating and ambiguous themes running through the *Sogno* was seen shortly thereafter, though in a deliberately burlesque vein, in the book by Riccardo Nobili, *A Modern Antique: A Florentine Story*, published in Edinburgh in 1908. It tells the story of the extraordinary ability of the forger, Oddo Palmieri (presumably a projection of the author), to produce a fake 15th-century bust inspired by many of Desiderio's stylistic motifs. In an "extension of his biographical projection" into the character of Palmieri, Nobili "inserted the photograph [of this bust] at the start of his book" (fig. 79)—he had previously made a painted terracotta of it—inscribed on the base with the name of the girl portrayed, *Simonetta*, "and in the caption [of the photograph the words] *by Oddo Palmieri*" (Gentilini, in exh. cat. Florence 1985, pp. 442–44).

8. Sisi 2001, p. 19.

9. Cicognara 1813–1818, II, 1816, p. 70.

10. A brief survey of the 19th-century bibliography relating to the sculptor, also dealing with the complex problems of attribution of the work, can be read in Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 95–104.

11. Gentilini 1985, p. 378.

12. Gentilini, in exh. cat. Florence 1985, pp. 318–23; Gentilini 1985, pp. 365–89: a fundamental contribution to the topic of the collection of Donatello's works in the 18th and 19th centuries. Examples of the success of the image of the Saint John during the 19th century were to be its insertion at the feet of Donatello by Girolamo Torrini (1847/48) for the series of famous Florentines destined for the outdoor loggia of the Uffizi (Jacopozzi 2001, pp. 73–74), and the painting at the end of the century by Giuseppe Pierotti, an artist from the province of Lucca (Comanducci 1934, II, p. 167; Frulli 2002, p. 84; Panzetta 2003, II, p. 694), *A Child Contemplating the Bust of the Young Saint John the Baptist by Candlelight*, now in the offices of the Accademia di Belle Arti, Carrara (fig. 80; inv. 48).

13. Mastrorocco, in exh. cat. Florence 1985–1986, pp. 152–80.

14. Barocchi, Gaeta Bertelà 1985–1986; Barocchi, Gaeta Bertelà 1985.

15. Bernini 1990, pp. 96–103; Torressi 2000, p. 64; Panzetta 2003, I, p. 362.

16. Torressi 2000, pp. 113–14; Panzetta 2003, II, p. 840.

17. Torressi 2000, p. 53; Panzetta 2003, I, p. 224.

18. Torressi 2000, p. 76; Panzetta 2003, I, p. 438.

19. The figure of Giovanni Bastianini has unquestionably been the focus of interest for specialists. The important research by Giancarlo Gentilini (1988, pp. 35–43; 27–43) has been followed more recently by that of Anita Fiderer Moskowitz (2004, pp. 157–85), which produced slightly different conclusions, and of Ulrike Ilg (2005, pp. 370–74) and Jeremy Warren (2005, pp. 729–41). Readers are referred to these texts and their bibliographies for a general picture of what is perhaps one of the most intriguing problems of Florentine sculpture of the 19th century.

20. Gentilini 1989, pp. 155–76.

DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO IN HIS TIME

Jean-René Gaborit

Trying to restore an artist to his historical context is always a hazardous venture. In stressing the circumstances that affected the period in which he lived, is there not a risk of painting a reductive picture: the artist as the pure "product" of his times? At the opposite extreme, it is sometimes tempting, especially where there are gaps in our knowledge or where there is no knowledge at all, to show the same artist as being totally unaffected by changes that he supposedly witnessed as a passive spectator, passing through social troubles, religious quarrels, wars, and famines *une rose à la main*, with the pretext that no evident relationship of cause and effect can be perceived between these events and the works before our eyes. If, as with Desiderio, the artist lived in the "Medici century," the disjunction between what we consider a Golden Age, as far as the arts and thought are concerned, and the trivial brutality of the struggles for political and economic power seems all the more glaring.

The chronology is sometimes of great help in resolving this dilemma, as is particularly true in the case of Desiderio da Settignano: his date of birth, established, admittedly with some uncertainty, around 1428, and that of his death, which is much more certainly 1464, coincide with the taking of power and establishment of the authority of Cosimo de' Medici, called the Elder. In 1429, Cosimo took over from his father as the head of the Medici bank. He very quickly came into conflict with Rinaldo degli Albizzi who, in 1433, succeeded in having him exiled; but the following year he was summoned back to Florence and rid himself of his enemies. A strange form of government then became established in the city: the institutions of the republic remained, but the reality of power lay in the hands of Cosimo, who governed without ruling.

Elections (manipulated) were held with lotteries (gerrymandered), and the citizens of Florence seemed ready to accept anything, including a sort of "permanent coup d'état" that modified the number, competence, and designation of the representative organs that were supposedly the only means of preventing what was feared above all: the "tyranny" of a foreign lord, imposed by the enemies of their city-state. No doubt in order to avoid any accusation of trying to establish a fiefdom, Cosimo took on the post of *gonfaloniere* only on three separate occasions. But upon his death in 1464, the same year that saw the death of Desiderio, he succeeded in transmitting his privileges, if not his ability, to his son, Piero "the Gouty." Cosimo's practices differed very little, if at all, in principle (or lack of principle!), from those of his predecessors, Maso degli Albizzi, Rinaldo Gianfigliazzi, or Niccolò da Uzzano, all of whom had been masters of Florence without ever having been its "lord."

Fig. 81
Desiderio da Settignano
Detail of cat. 23
Decoration of the frieze framing the tabernacle

These practices were implemented with great adroitness and virtuosity over considerable time, to the point that they rendered almost natural the hereditary transmission of power within an ostensibly republican form of government.

But unlike his contemporary, Mino da Fiesole, who was born in 1429 and died in 1484, Desiderio never witnessed the height of Medici power, under Lorenzo the Magnificent. During Desiderio's lifetime, in the struggle between the various patrician clans, the adversaries of the Medici were not yet the Pazzi (who were to take the initiative in the famous conspiracy of 1478) but, as we have seen, the Albizzi, at the head of the oligarchical party, the Peruzzi, or Palla di Neri Strozzi, the richest man in Florence. This last benefited from the support of some representatives of the greatest families (Pitti, Soderini, Capponi, Acciaioli, Tornabuoni), whose opposition would survive until the time of Piero the Gouty, although Luca Pitti in 1466 judged it preferable to make peace with him.

Did Desiderio and the members of his family take sides in these political struggles? Of the 40,000 inhabitants of Florence at the time, little more than 6,000 met the conditions that made them eligible for public positions (they had to belong to the Guelph Party; be a member of one of the "arts," that is, a guild; be aged over 25; reside in Florence; and pay their taxes). It is not certain that Desiderio's father, Meo di Francesco, was eligible in 1427, when he appears in the census. He was a member of the *contadini* (peasant) class whose members, despite their agricultural calling, were counted as citizens of Florence because of the extension of the town's territory. Later, in 1477, his inscription in the Guild of Masters of Stone and Wood, into which Desiderio was admitted in 1453 at the age of 25, enabled him to join the category of "active citizens." Should we deduce from this that his father was particularly interested in the life of the city? Nothing can be less certain. It is extremely unlikely that he attended the *pratiche*, informal meetings of rich and influential Florentines to discuss any issues deemed important. As a member of a minor guild and hence of the *populo minuto*, Meo di Francesco, like his sons, might have been a supporter of the Medici who—since the time of Salvestro de' Medici at the end of the 14th century and, above all, of Giovanni di Bicci, Cosimo's father—had always taken the side of the minor guilds. But like many Florentines, Meo di Francesco was perhaps also nostalgic for the ten years between 1410 and 1420, a time of prosperity and peace during which Florence succeeded in staying clear of the conflicts between the various Italian states. According to the historian Guicciardini, the period was considered one of the happiest in the history of Florence.

The situation Desiderio knew in his childhood and youth was quite different. Cosimo may not have wished to play a political role on a larger stage than that of the city of Florence alone, but he was forced to by necessity. He intervened in foreign affairs, especially those of northern Italy—Florence had already been involved in the war of 1425–27 between Venice and Filippo-Maria Visconti, lord of Milan, which concluded with the Peace of Ferrara (1428), negotiated by Cosimo himself shortly before his exile.

With the conquest of Pisa (1406), the firm control of some Tuscan ports, the purchase of Livorno (Leghorn), and the inclusion of Volterra within the territory of Florence, the city had become a landholding principality, with a population of about 250,000 inhabitants (some of doubtful allegiance). This region now had to defend itself from the appetites of

its neighbors, near or far, and to do this, it laid the basis for a tax-collecting regime that, although not equitable, was at least relatively rational.

The victory at Anghiari (29 June 1440), followed by the Peace of Cavriana, assured Florentines of a certain respite just at a time when the transfer of the ecumenical council from Ferrara to Florence gave the city greater prestige. But it was only with the Peace of Lodi (1454) that a new period of relative calm ensued. As sometimes occurs, a restoration of peace abroad coincided with renewed conflict at home: faced with a stiffening of the Medicean system, new patrician conspiracies (1457; 1460 by Girolamo Macchiavelli) threatened the ruling power. The Peace of Italy, proclaimed by Pope Pius II in 1455, remained fragile and did not stop every local conflict, but it nevertheless did correspond with the situation on the ground, and many people of the time responded to it, even though their anxiety grew with the progress and conquests made by the Ottomans.

There is nothing to indicate that Desiderio ever traveled outside Florence. The fact that he received the commission for a project in the cathedral of Orvieto and that he has been linked with Urbino (where some of his works were supposedly preserved and later transported to Florence) does not imply that he personally traveled to either place. To suggest he did remains problematic. Once again, the permanence of his residence in Florence contrasts with that of his contemporary, Mino da Fiesole, who had left for Rome and perhaps Naples as a youth. But a sedentary approach to life spared Desiderio from having to become a part-time spy, as did Jacopo della Quercia, who in 1437 reported to the municipality of Siena concerning the movement of troops he had observed traveling in northern Italy.

Should we consider Desiderio a Medicean artist in the service of Cosimo the Elder? He seems not to have been involved in the decoration of the palace in Via Larga (now Palazzo Medici-Riccardi), nor to have received commissions for the churches in the environs of Florence for which Cosimo had altarpieces made. But of the two major works he produced, one, the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo* (cat. 23), was certainly a commission from Cosimo, while the other, the *Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini* (cat. 1) in Santa Croce, could not have been made without at least the unofficial approval of the master of Florence. It might even be possible to "read" the tabernacle as one example of the exploitation, which could be blatant or subtle, of devotional images—one of the main thrusts of Cosimo's patronage.

As we have already mentioned, Desiderio died in the same year as Cosimo the Elder. The sculptor's death was supposedly lamented in a number of short epigrams and sonnets. If we knew these texts and their authors, we would be able to discover or guess at many of the possible ties between the sculptor and the Medici circle.

It is something of a paradox that an artist who, in our eyes, is one of the most perfect incarnations of the Florentine Renaissance has seemingly left no trace in history, even anecdotal, and that historical events in turn seem not to have had the slightest impact on his work.

DESIDERIO'S FLORENCE

Tommaso Mozzati

Desiderio da Settignano's life and work are closely linked to mid-quattrocento Florence. From the time he settled there with his brothers Geri and Francesco, probably at the end of the 1440s, the sculptor lived among the city's streets and squares, and found a market for his works. His chief commissions came from the city's well-to-do residents and great families, such as the Medici, Boni, Gianfigliazzi, and Strozzi.

Desiderio's fame since the 19th century has largely rested on the extraordinary reliefs he produced for private worship and on portraits of astonishing quality; he also executed famous monumental works, such as the *Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini* and the Tabernacle for the Sacrament in San Lorenzo. The map of the city's center included in this catalogue identifies (by number) the sites of his works that are still in religious buildings. Locations of the workshops, residences, and the tomb of the sculptor are also designated (by letter).

Works

1) Basilica of Santa Croce
Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini
Funerary Monument of Leonardo Bruni
(Bernardo Rossellino and workshop)
Tomb slab of Gregorio Marsuppini
Frieze on the portico of the Pazzi Chapel

2) Basilica of San Lorenzo
Tabernacle of San Lorenzo

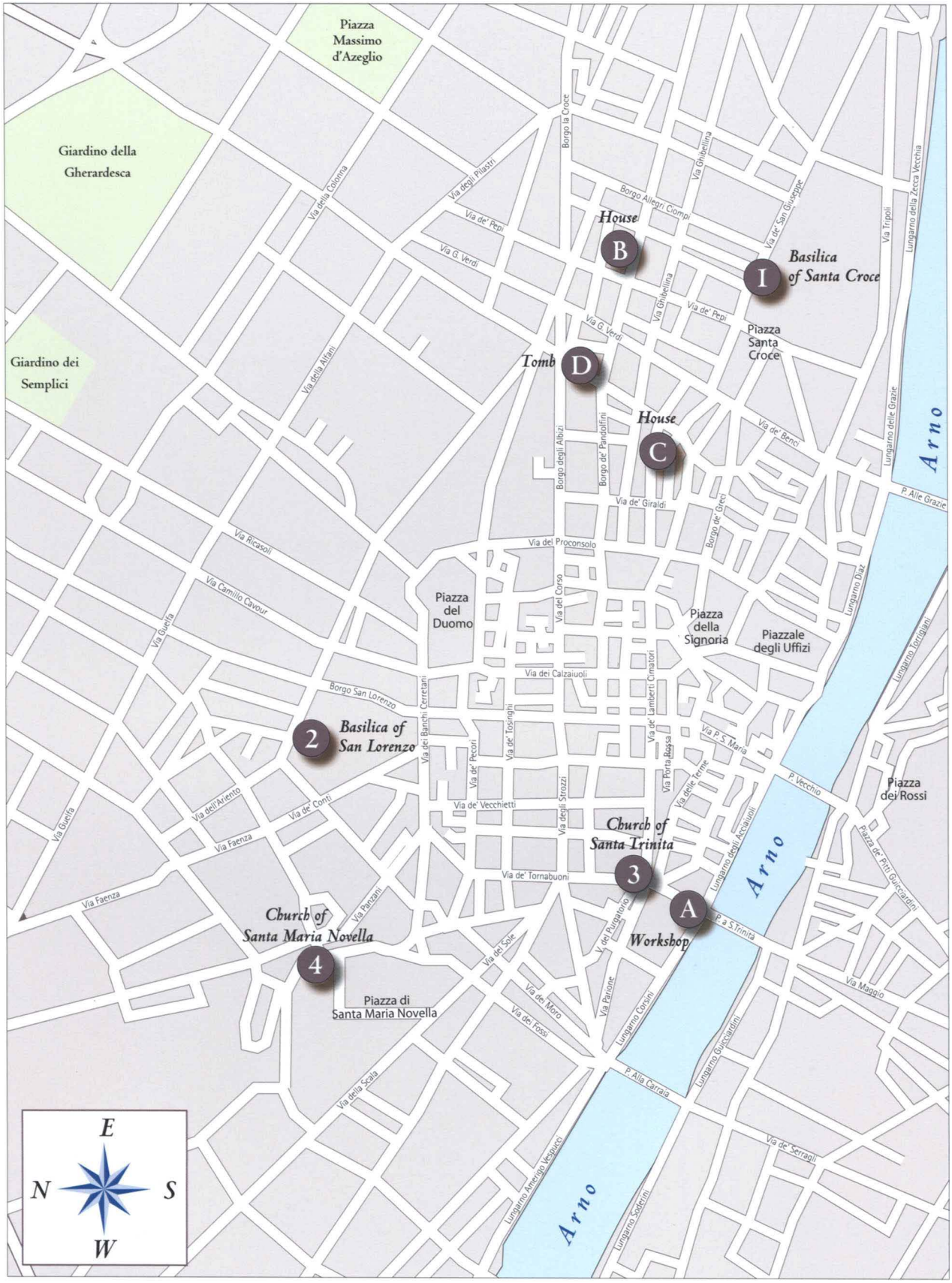
3) Church of Santa Trinita
Mary Magdalene

4) Church of Santa Maria Novella
Funerary Monument of the Blessed Villana
(Bernardo Rossellino and workshop)

Workshop
A) Workshop in Palazzo Gianfigliazzi near the Ponte Santa Trinita ([1455?]/1457–59)

Houses
B) House in Via Santa Maria (today Via Buonarroti; acquired 1456; residence 1458–59)
C) House in the parish of San Simone (1461–62)

Tomb
D) Church of San Pier Maggiore (destroyed in the 18th century)


Piazza Massimo d'Azeglio
Giardino della Gherardesca
Giardino dei Semplici
House
B
Basilica of Santa Croce
I
Piazza Santa Croce
Tomb
D
House
C
Basilica of San Lorenzo
2
Piazza del Duomo
Piazza della Signoria
Piazzale degli Uffizi
Church of Santa Trinita
3
Workshop
A
Church of Santa Maria Novella
4
Piazza di Santa Maria Novella
Piazza dei Rossi
Arno
Arno
Arno
Borgo la Croce
Via Ghibellina
Borgo Allegri Ciompi
Via de' San Giuseppe
Via Tripoli
Lungarno della Zecca Vecchia
Via degli Pilastri
Via della Colonna
Via de' Pepi
Via G. Verdi
Via della Afrani
Lungarno delle Grazie
Via de' Benci
P. Alle Grazie
Borgo degli Albizi
Borgo de' Pandolfini
Via de' Giraldi
Borgo de' Greci
Via del Proconsolo
Via del Corso
Via Ricasoli
Via Camillo Cavour
Via Guelfa
Lungarno Diaz
Lungarno Torrigiani
Via dei Calzaiuoli
Via de' Lamberti Cimatori
Borgo San Lorenzo
Via dei Banchi Cerretani
Via de' Tosinghi
Via P. S. Maria
Via de' Pecori
Via Porta Rossa
Via delle Terme
P. Vecchio
Via de' Conti
Via dell'Ariento
Via de' Vecchietti
Via degli Strozzi
Via Faenza
Via de' Tornabuoni
Lungarno degli Archibusieri
Piazza de' Pitti Guicciardini
Via Panzani
Via del Sole
Via del Purgatorio
P. a S.Trinita
Via Maggio
Via Parione
Via de' Moro
Via de' Rossi
Lungarno Corsini
Lungarno Guicciardini
Via della Scala
P. Alla Carraia
Via de' Serragli
Lungarno Amerigo Vespucci
Lungarno Soderini
E
N
S
W

CATALOGUE

Desiderio da Settignano
Detail of cat. 12
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département
des Sculptures, inv. RF 1626

Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini, completed ca. 1459

Marble with traces of gilding and polychromy, surrounded by fresco
Monument (from the base to the midpoint of the arch): 358 cm
Base: 98 cm
Plinth: 30 cm
Shield-bearing angel on the left: 89 cm
Shield-bearing angel on the right: 89 cm
Garland-bearing angel on the left: 123 cm
Garland-bearing angel on the right: 124 cm
Reclining effigy: 196 cm
Tondo, diam.: 116 cm
Church of Santa Croce, Florence

Restored in 1996–97 by the Opificio delle Pietre Dure of Florence

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Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 158–75 (with previous bibl.); Markham Schulz 1991, p. 388; Markham Schulz 1992, pp. 179–81; Danti, Giusti, Lanfranchi, Weeks 1998; Weeks 1999, pp. 735–38.

The *Monument of Carlo Marsuppini* stands in the sixth bay of the left aisle in Santa Croce, opposite the *Tomb of Leonardo Bruni,* Marsuppini's predecessor as chancellor of Florence, in a symmetry that seems to symbolize the transition of the office. In Bruni's tomb, designed by Bernardo Rossellino, Anne Markham Schulz traced the contribution of the young sculptor from Settignano, who would thus have prepared himself, in working on the monument to a Florentine chancellor, for the demanding commission dedicated to that man's successor.

Born into a family from Arezzo, Marsuppini served as the tutor to Lorenzo and Giovanni de' Medici, and in 1431 was invited to the Florentine *studio* (university) to teach poetry, rhetoric, philosophy, and Greek. In 1444 he was appointed chancellor. After his death nine years later, on 24 April 1453, his burial place was honored with an imposing funerary monument, funded in part by the Martelli and Medici families, as is inferred by a document recently made known by Markham Schulz. In a letter written on 7 June 1459, Antonio Martelli wrote to Piero de' Medici at Careggi asking him to intervene in what appeared to be a very thorny issue: the choice of epitaph to be inscribed on Marsuppini's sarcophagus. In the absence of direct documentation relating to the construction phases of the tomb, this letter has been cited by the scholar as evidence that the work must have been far from completion in the summer of 1459. According to Markham Schulz, this assertion is supported by another letter, written to Piero de' Medici by Francesco Griffolini on 19 July 1459, which demonstrates that the question of the epitaph had not yet been resolved despite the prior request (Markham Schulz 1992, pp. 179–81; previously cited in Markham Schulz 1991, p. 388).

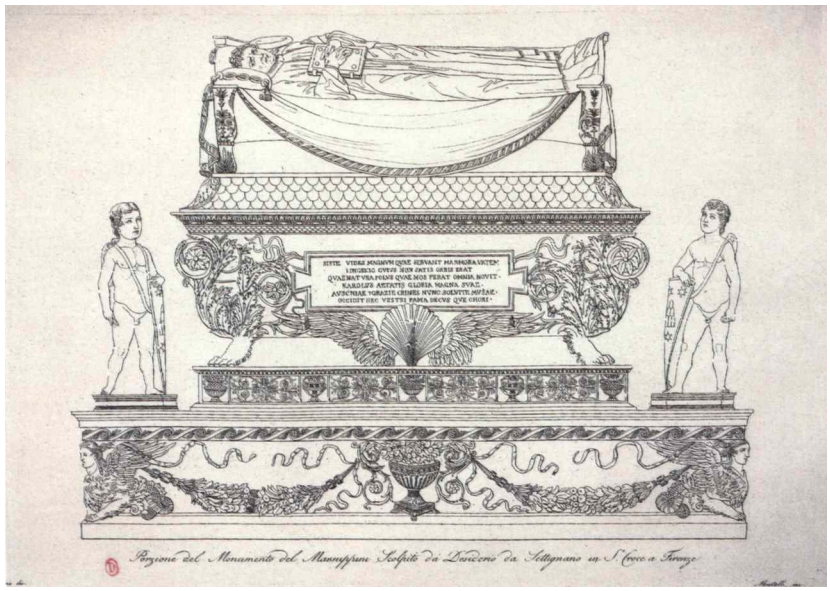
We believe, however, that the first of the two letters may instead be interpreted as evidence that the Marsuppini tomb was almost completed in June 1459. Antonio Martelli asked Piero to decide on the inscription with these words: "And if you do not intervene there will be no honor in this affair; with the hope that we can bring the matter to a conclusion before Saint John's Day, accept this charge in memory of Messer Carlo, who merits it."[1] The reference to the feast day of the city's patron saint (John the Baptist, 24 June) could only be explained as a possible and hoped-for date for the inauguration of the monument. To judge from Griffolini's letter, the deadline cannot have been met: however, that this date was even under consideration argues that work on the tomb was far advanced at the time that Martelli wrote his brief letter.

On the other hand, the text inscribed on the tablet, despite the elegance of the characters, is not centered or uniform, thus suggesting that the letter-cutter was obliged to adapt the epitaph to a space that had not been planned for those verses. The production of the tomb, therefore, could have preceded the drafting of the inscription. Indeed, the actual chiseling on stone may have occurred when the monument had already been installed in Santa Croce, still hidden from curious eyes before the unveiling ceremony (for a conflicting opinion, see Markham Schulz 1992, p. 181).

Attributed by all sources to Desiderio (Cardellini 1962, pp. 158–59), the monument must have been the artist's first project to require the involvement of a well-organized workshop—in other words, it was a far more complex job than anything he had previously undertaken. On 20 June 1453, Desiderio had registered with the Guild of Masters of Stone and Wood (*Arte dei Maestri di Pietra e Legname*)—a step taken, perhaps, to allow him to receive a commission that, on the death of the humanist Marsuppini, must have been deemed necessary to bestow quickly (Kennedy 1930, pp. 265–66). Moreover, between 1452 and 1454 Florence may have seemed devoid of masters trained in the difficult task of working marble, the "classic," traditional medium for commemoration of the dead. Bernardo was in Rome, Donatello was still in Padua, and Michelozzo had moved on to architecture, leaving the young but promising Desiderio—the pupil of the first and the imitator of the second—in competition with Antonio Rossellino, who from the start seems to have followed in the footsteps of his slightly younger colleague.

Although it is difficult to establish when work began, we may suppose that Desiderio won the commission with the backing of Donatello, who had just returned to Florence (1454). At that time, in the second half of the 1450s, the older master championed his

Fig. 83
Funerary Monument of Carlo Marsuppini
Leopoldo Cicognara, *Storia della scultura dal suo risorgimento in Italia*, vol. 2, Venice, Piccoti, 1816, pl. XIII
Bibliothèque de l'Institut National d'Histoire de l'Art, Paris, Jacques-Doucet Collection



25-year-old colleague as the right sculptor to make the base for his own bronze *David*. And there do seem, in fact, to be many similarities between the plinth of the Marsuppini tomb and the pedestal for the Medici courtyard, as Francesco Caglioti (2000, pp. 101–52) recently discussed. Yet in 1457, after setting Desiderio on the path of this important project, Donatello was once again far from Florence. The young sculptor, who must already have made a place for himself in the Florentine art world, was therefore completely free to invent original compositional and ornamental solutions. Those he found moved away from the artistic vocabulary, respectful of a Roman classicism overflowing with imagery, that Donatello had definitively formulated in Padua. Thus the tomb tempers the classicism of the triumphal arch motif, and distances itself from the stately formal preferences of Rossellino through a more graceful and charming approach to decoration, marked by a Ghibertian elegance. In the words of the perspicacious critic, Giorgio Vasari, the tomb of Carlo Marsuppini became an Eden populated by "children and angels, executed in a beautiful and lively manner," with "certain wings … that seem to be made not of marble but of feathers"[2] (for a discussion on the various participants in the work, see the Gentilini essay in this catalogue).

The Marsuppini tomb can certainly be read as a "public place" in which the city of Florence saw itself reflected in the virtue of one of its leading citizens. The civic concerns, however, had to be balanced with those of a private, family burial place. The wall tomb was supplemented with a burial slab in dark green marble (*verde di prato*) set into the floor of the church, against the plinth. The slab was dedicated by Giovanni Marsuppini (Carlo's brother) to their father Gregorio: "an attorney most eminent in civil and canon law" (*civilis pontificiique iuris consultiassimo*). Vasari also attributed this slab to Desiderio. The severely worn state of the marble induced Cardellini to suspend judgment on its authorship, but stylistic and structural clues seem to support its autograph status and suggest that the two works may have been executed at the same time.

Restoration in 1996–97 showed that, along with extensive use of polychromy on the marble, the entire structure was completed with a fictive a canopy painted in fresco on the wall to frame the tomb (Danti, Giusti, Lanfranchi, Weeks 1998; Weeks 1999, pp. 735–38).

TM

1. "…esse tu non ci metti le mani non se n'à aver onore, e sse avanti S. Giovanni s'avesse stare a tenpo, piaciatj volerne questo incarico per memoria di messer Carlo che llo merita," ASF, Archives d'État de Florence, Mediceo avanti il principato, fiasse XVII, 207 r.
2. "…alcuni fanciulli ed alcuni angeli, condotti con maniera bella e vivace," "alcune ali […] che non di marmo ma piumose si mostrano," Vasari-Milanesi, p. 109–10; Vasari-Chastel, 1983, IV, p. 118.


SISTE VIDES MAGNVM QVAE SERVANT MARMORA VATEM ·
INGENIO CVIVS NON SATIS ORBIS ERAT ·
QVAE NATVRA POLVS QVAE MOS FERAT OMNIA NOVIT ·
KAROLVS AETATIS GLORIA MAGNA SVAE ·
AVSONIAE ZGRAIAE CRINES NVNC SOLVITE MVSAE ·
OCCIDIT HEV VESTRI FAMA DECVS QVE CHORI ·

2 DONATELLO AND DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

Martelli Saint John, ca. 1440 and 1457

Not exhibited in Washington

Marble statue, with minimal traces of gilding
H: 173 cm; base: 54 x 37 cm
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence,
inv. Sculture 435

PROVENANCE

Florence, Palazzo di Roberto Martelli in Via de' Martelli (formerly Via degli Spadai), *ab origine* until 1754; Florence, Palazzo di Niccolò Martelli in Via Zanetti (formerly Via della Forca), from 1754 to 1913. Purchased by the Italian State on 13 June 1913. Transferred to the Museo Nazionale del Bargello (Donatello Room) on 24 June 1913.

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Vasari 1550 and 1568, III, pp. 212–13; Kauffmann 1935, pp. 43–47; 150–52; 210–11 (Donatello, ca. 1438–39, with earlier bibliography, all supporting it as an autograph work by Donatello); Lànyi 1935, pp. 129–30 (Desiderio, post 1453); Planiscig 1949-1, p. 55 ff. (Desiderio, 1453–55); Aronberg Lavin 1955, p. 85 ff. (Donatello); Janson 1957, II, pp. 191–96 (Donatello, ca. 1455); Grassi 1958, p. 100 (Donatello ca. 1455, finished by Desiderio); Pope-Hennessy 1996, p. 126 (Desiderio); Lisner 1958, pp. 62–65 (Donatello, post 1453); Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 206–16 (Desiderio, 1455–60); Schlegel 1967, pp. 138, 142 (Donatello); Markham Schulz 1977, p. 14 (Donatello); Parronchi 1980-2, pp. 129–31 (Donatello); Vines 1981, p. 133 (Desiderio); Herzner 1982, pp. 74, 121–23 (Donatello, post 1453); Beck 1984, pp. 212, 219–20 (Desiderio, 1460–61); Gaeta Bertelà, in exh. cat. Florence 1985, pp. 298–304 (Desiderio); Civai 1990, p. 24–30; 33–36 (Donatello); Markham Schulz 1991, p. 389 (Desiderio); Rosenauer 1993, pp. 320–21 (Desiderio, ca. 1460); Pope-Hennessy 1993, p. 276; Caglioti 1995, pp. 23, 47–48 (Donatello); Parronchi 1998, pp. 53–56 (Donatello, before 1442); Gentilini 1998, pp. 119, 129 (Donatello); Caglioti 2000, pp. 117, 158–59, 252–53 (Donatello, ca. 1442); Coonin 2004.

Even as late as the 1930s, no work given to Donatello in a private collection could boast an attribution so certain: it had been authenticated by the most reliable sources throughout the whole of the cinquecento—Antonio Billi's *Libro*, the *Anonimo Gaddiano*, Gelli, Vasari, and Bocchi—and confirmed without exception by the art literature of the following three centuries (on the sources and the work's critical reception, see Janson 1957, II, p. 191 ff.).

On the other hand, until it was purchased by the Italian state in 1913 and installed with the other works by Donatello in the Bargello, the sculpture had been hidden away from the world in the Martelli household by the descendants of Roberto di Niccolò (1408–64), to whom Donatello had given it as an expression of gratitude. Vasari explicitly mentions this gift in the first edition of the *Lives*, and he also refers to the *fidecommisso* (family trust) set up to ensure that the sculpture would always remain the property of the family (Vasari 1550–68, pp. 212–13). Recently discovered documents confirm that Francesco Martelli, Roberto's son, stated in his wills of 1523 and 1529 that the *Saint John* "by the hand of Donatello" not only could not be sold by his descendants *in infinito*, but also could not be moved from the Martelli house on pain that it would be ceded to the Baptistery of San Giovanni (Civai 1989, pp. 254–55; Civai 1990, p. 25). This prescription was so carefully respected that the statue was only briefly "lent" to the baptistery in 1541 to celebrate the baptism of Prince Francesco (who succeeded Duke Cosimo I), where it was displayed on a fine base carved by Tribolo (Vasari-Milanesi, VI, pp. 89–90); and that more than two centuries later, in 1754, Niccolò Martelli, the then owner of the sculpture, was obliged to ask permission from the grand duke to transfer the work from his house in Via de' Martelli, where it had always been kept, to his own house in Via della Forca, where it was to remain until its transfer to the Bargello. This latter event occurred on 24 June 1913 (the feast of Saint John the Baptist, patron saint of the city) and was accompanied by the joyful and stirring sound of the bells.[1]

Finally able to study the sculpture at length, in full light, and in direct comparison with other works by Donatello, the then director of the museum, Giacomo De Nicola, immediately received an impression—almost an unconscious doubt—that the work may have been by Desiderio (De Nicola 1913, p. 277). But it was Jeno Lànyi who, more than twenty years later (1935), following a stylistic analysis of the sculpture, first argued that attribution of the *Martelli Saint John* should be shifted from Donatello (to whom it had been linked by an authoritative historiographic tradition, though without documentary evidence) to Desiderio, an opinion shared by many art historians. So the situation remained until Janson (1957) published a major monograph on Donatello in which he unreservedly assigned the *Saint John* to the master's late period, and thus reopened the still unresolved debate (see Caglioti 2000, pp. 158–59). The different opinions—Donatello; Desiderio; Donatello and Desiderio together—today have an effect not only on the authorship of the sculpture, but also on its dating, to judge from a careful

examination of the latest literature on both masters. The documentation may not actually refer directly to the *Saint John*, but it allows the field of hypotheses to be narrowed and plausible sets of circumstances for its manufacture to be considered closely without, however, leaving aside formal analysis of the work, which, though indispensable, is always to some extent subjective. Whereas the strangeness of this slender, lean adolescent *Baptist*, with his lost, visionary gaze, is only seen again in some of Gericault's paintings of the insane, and is fully consistent with the innovatory genius of Donatello (Aronberg Lavin 1955), the sculpture has been polished almost all over to an extraordinary finish, an aspect the master never gave his works. The surfaces have been smoothed to the point of wear and, more important, the marble has been given an interior and almost "diaphanous" luminosity, both of which are aspects typical of Desiderio's lyrical (but also technical) manner.

Whatever the explanation, it seems that the Martelli sculpture was a unique case in the work of either master, and a collaboration between the two—probably, even fairly certainly (Pope-Hennessy 1993, p. 276), in the decade between Donatello's return from Padua (1453) and Desiderio's death (1464)—is now seriously a consideration, made possible by the firm early date of the *Baptist* in the Frari (1438), the work by Donatello with which the *Martelli Saint John* has undoubted formal affinities, and by the discovery of documents that considerably limit the likelihood of Desiderio's being the author of the wooden *Magdalen* in Santa Trinita (Waldman 2000, pp. 13–18). Of the works by Desiderio, it is the one most often deemed in direct relation with the Martelli statue because of its similar subject, life-size dimensions, and the fact that it is in full relief (see fig. 4).

In summary, the possible attributions of the work are to Donatello, presumably before his departure to Padua in 1442, and therefore without any contribution from Desiderio, who was at that time still a child (Caglioti 2000); or to Desiderio alone, during the short period of his mature work and at the time he was most strongly influenced by Donatello (1455–60), which is still the prevailing hypothesis; or, finally, as a collaboration between the two, with the fundamentals put in place by Donatello and the "finishing" by Desiderio. This last hypothesis was expressed by Grassi (1958) and has now cautiously been proposed once more by Coonin (2004) based on stylistic factors—not so much as a conviction, but rather as a compromise to find a way out of the impasse. To me, however, it seems to be a tenable argument—based on close examination of the sculpture itself and the findings in the latest studies—on the grounds that both masters did not work on it at the same time, nor was the work divided equally between them. Donatello would have sculpted it at the end of the 1430s for an unknown destination, and Desiderio would have made "finishing touches," though also notably modifying it, in about 1457 for the new palazzo of Roberto Martelli, to whom Donatello would have given it on his departure for Siena (which he considered a permanent move) in the autumn of that year.

For the arguments that support this hypothesis and for a more detailed description of the work, readers are referred to my essay in this catalogue on the *Martelli Saint John* (pp. 61–73).

BPS

1. See E. Bertaux, "Le 'Saint Jean' des Martelli," in *La Revue de l'Art Ancien et Moderne* 2 (1913), pp. 187–95.

THE BUSTS

Marc Bormand

In the 1450s, Florence saw the emergence of a new genre in sculpture: that of the portrait bust.[1] These were generally carved in the round; cropped below the shoulders, they could stand flat on a level surface. They were generally life-size and depicted the head, neck, and shoulders. This new form distinguishes them from antique busts, which were usually cut in a V or curve, and with hollowed backs. In design, the Florence busts are related to another tradition: the medieval one of the reliquary bust, which was quite common in Tuscany and was usually made of polychrome wood or of metal. Examples include the bust of *Saint Zenobius* (Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence) and that of the *Beata Umiliana dei Cerchi* (fig. 84).

As is the case with so many new inventions in sculpture, it is to Donatello that we must attribute the first surviving example from the Renaissance of a reliquary bust endowed with "naturalistic" expressiveness: the *Bust of San Rossore* (fig. 94), dated about 1428. It should be no surprise that two of the busts attributed to Desiderio depict saints. The *Young Deacon* (cat. 5) doubtless constitutes the first example of the bust of a saint in terracotta, a technique that enjoyed growing success in Florence in the latter half of the century, especially in the workshops of Verrocchio and Agnolo di Polo. And thanks to a recent restoration, the rediscovery of a fragmentary inscription has made it possible to give a name to the female bust hitherto called "*La Belle Florentine*": it depicts Saint Constance, companion of Saint Ursula and herself a martyr (cat. 8). This work, often attributed to the workshop of Desiderio, embodies a sort of feminine ideal in vogue during the Florentine Renaissance. With the subject's identity newly recognized, the abstract and symmetrical nature of the features in the bust reminds us of the ambiguous dimension to female portraiture in this period.

Along with these religious sculptures, secular portraits constituted a large part of the work of Tuscan sculptors in the 1450s, to an extent not seen since antiquity. The contacts these artists enjoyed with the great patrician families ruling the city are frequently attested to and the first dated bust, that of Piero di Cosimo de' Medici (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence), by Mino da Fiesole, indicating a date of 1454, was followed in the same decade by other portraits of members of the Medici and Strozzi families, as well as of others. This renewal is also associated with the rediscovery of Roman texts, including that of Pliny the Elder who, in his *Natural History*, linked the spread of the notion of a man's worth to the preservation of his memory and the display of his portrait.[2] Frequently associated with a funerary context within Rome, this link, between showing a man's worth and presenting his portrait within the home, came to have a certain importance in Medicean

Fig. 84
Florence, second half of the 15th century?
Beata Umiliana dei Cerchi
silver
Santa Croce, Florence

Florence. On account of the age of the sitter depicted, the *Young Boy* (cat. 4) possesses an exceptional character—if, that is, it is indeed a secular bust; it differs from most of the contemporary busts, which generally have adult or elderly sitters as their subjects. Female busts, instead, constitute one of the most highly appreciated and enigmatic genres of the early Florentine Renaissance. They were quite popular at the end of the 19th century: numerous copies were produced at that time, when the aura of mystery emanating from their quasi anonymity seemed calculated to appeal to the neo-Romantic historicist imagination.

Late 19th-century critics saw numerous connections between Desiderio's works and those of Francesco Laurana. It was only later that the individual characteristics of each one's œuvre, imprinted with its own distinct ideals, were recognized. At least two busts subsequently attributed to Francesco Laurana had previously been attributed to Desiderio: a pseudo *Marietta Strozzi* purchased in Florence by Bode in 1876 for the museum in Berlin (inv. 260), which had been formerly published by Perkins as a Desiderio,[3] and a Beatrice of Aragon in the Frick Collection, New York, exhibited in 1865 in Florence at the *Mostra del Medio Evo* in the Bargello.[4]

They are enigmatic because with very few exceptions, the sitters for the sculptures that survive are unknown. This anonymity, however, seems not to have been a concern in the 15th century: Antonio Billi mentions the existence of a bust

Fig. 85
Francesco Laurana
Battista Sforza, marble
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence,
inv. Sculture 85

Fig. 86
Matteo Civitali (attributed)
Unknown Woman ("Donaldson Lady"), marble
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Anonymous gift
(Sir George Donaldson, London), 1893, inv. RF 935

Fig. 87
Princess of Urbino
limestone
Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Skulpturensammlung
und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, inv. 78

of Marietta Strozzi by Desiderio (see cat. 7) and Vasari mentions a portrait by Mino da Fiesole of Piero de' Medici's wife, Mona Lucrezia, located above a door in the Palazzo Medici in Via Larga as pendant to the bust of her husband. Later, witnesses during the turbulent years of Savonarola[5] describe the "bonfire of the vanities" in February 1497 and February 1498, in which numerous female busts were burned, and of which only the names survive: "la bella Bencia, la Lena Morella, la bella Bina, la Maria de' Lenzi." In Francesco Laurana's œuvre, only two female busts are formally identified by an inscription: the posthumous one naming Battista Sforza (fig. 85) and another naming Beatrice of Aragon (Frick Collection, New York). In both cases, the Latinized name is preceded by the word "diva," a word generally used in Roman times to commemorate deceased members of the family. The other busts are usually identified with princesses of the house of Aragon, which ruled in Naples from 1443. As in the case of busts of saints, the commemorative character licenses the idealization of the figure's features and this tendency makes it easier to understand the long-standing doubts concerning the identity of the bust of Saint Constance.

Along with the busts presented in the exhibition, other portraits have for a long time been attributed to Desiderio, which itself shows the importance accorded the artist in this domain: examples include the *Princess of Urbino* (fig. 87) and the *Donaldson Lady* (fig. 86), now given to Matteo Civitali.[6] With these three-dimensional works, the beholder's point of view plays an important part in determining how the figure is perceived. Although we are often accustomed to seeing these works on a sort of face-to-face basis, some written or visual descriptions of the 15th century suggest we should be more cautious. Mino's busts in Palazzo Medici were certainly placed high up, above a door within the palace.[7] A *cassone* panel by Jacopo del Sellaio, *The Banquet of Queen Vashti*, dating from the late 1480s, shows us a bust (of stone or marble) placed in a lunette above the door in a palace interior.[8] Such evidence gives further support to the idea that these busts were frequently placed high up. The different photographs of several works included in this catalogue show how they are altered both in the form of the face, which becomes rounder, and the expressiveness of the figure, which becomes more intense, when viewed from below rather than from in front. Recognition of this effect is one of the most important contributions we can make to the understanding of these works today.

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1. Concerning Florentine busts, see the classic article by Lavin 1970, and, more recently, Radcliffe 2001.
2. Schuyler 1976, pp. 11–16.
3. Perkins 1864, vol. I, p. 175; Perkins, S.D. [1869], I, p. 208.
4. Exh. cat. Florence, 1985, p. 89.
5. Pseudo-Burlamacchi, *La Vita del Beato Jeronimo Savonarola*, ed., P. Ginori Conti, Florence, p. 133, quoted in Coonin 1995-3, p. 162.
6. Francesco Caglioti, exh. cat. Lucques, 2004, p. 52.
7. Lorenzo's inventory, c. 38v, cited by Francesco Caglioti, exh. cat. Florence, 1992, no. 19, p. 42: "una testa di marmo sopra l'uscio dell'anticamera di tutto rilievo ritratto al naturale di Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici."
8. Lavin 1970 (1998), p. 61.

3 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO (attributed to)

Saint John the Baptist, ca. 1455

Marble, H: 50.2 cm; W: 38.2 cm; Depth: 22 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Sculptures, inv. RF 679

Restored in 2005 by Marie-Emmanuelle Meyohas

PROVENANCE

Albert Goupil bequest, 1884. Offered by the donor on a plinth of dark purple *breccia* marble decorated with bronze reliefs and bearing the inscription DONATELLI OPVS.

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Piot 1878, pp. 582–83 (attributed to Donatello); Semper 1887, p. 122 (probably Desiderio); Bode 1892–1905, p. 19 (Donatello, early 1420s); Michel 1897, no. 383 (Donatello); Venturi 1908, VI, p. 296 (master close to Antonio Rossellino); Vitry 1922, no. 705 (attributed to Donatello); Planiscig 1942, pp. 18–19 and no. 8, pp. 42–43 (Desiderio, between 1450 and 1453–1454); Cardellini 1962-1, p. 277 (Mino da Fiesole, about 1475–1480); Sciolla 1970, no. 82, pp. 116–17 (Mino da Fiesole, about 1475–1480); Middeldorf 1976, p. 24 (manner of Antonio Rossellino); Zuraw 1993, pp. 227, 230–31 and no. 41, pp. 748–50 (started by Mino da Fiesole and finished after his death by another artist, or executed after a model by Mino by a workshop assistant); exh. cat. Milan, 2002, cited in no. 5, note by Francesco Caglioti, pp. 64–67 (circle of Desiderio, about 1460–1470).

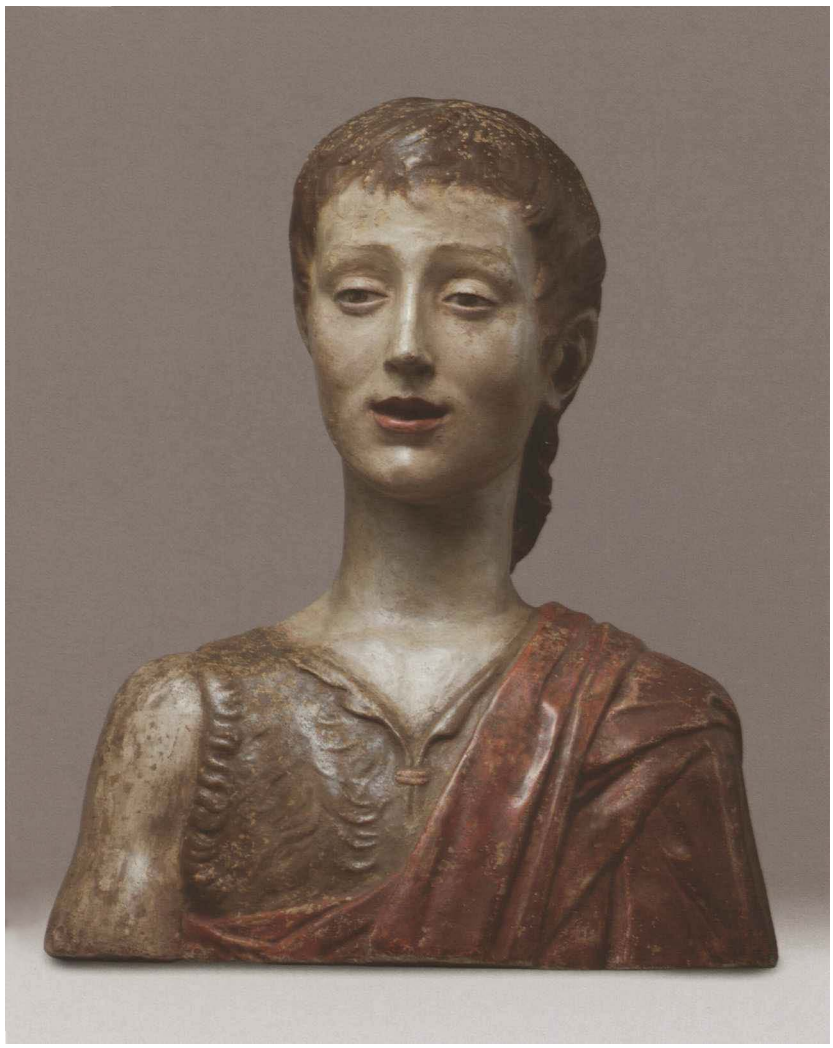
Albert Goupil, a Parisian collector, owned two busts of the young Baptist: the first was bought in his sale in 1888 by the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Lyon (inv. D.382). Signed *opus mini* on the plinth, its attribution to Mino da Fiesole has nevertheless sometimes been disputed (Zuraw 1993, no. 37, pp. 735–40). The second entered the Louvre in 1884 as a bequest from its owner, with the prestigious name of Donatello, and was shown to best advantage on a plinth decorated with garland-bearing putti and an inscription reading DONATELLI OPUS (the work of Donatello).

Such was the attribution favored by Eugène Piot in 1878, followed by other critics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, except for Paul Schubring and Adolfo Venturi (1908) who attributed it to the circle of Antonio Rossellino. An attribution to Mino da Fiesole or his circle was put forward by Ida Cardellini (1962), without much in the way of stylistic argument, which was followed by Shelley Zuraw (1993), who compared this work to the *God the Father* in the tabernacle in the church of Sant' Ambrogio, Florence, but also noted differences between it and other figures by Mino in the treatment of the curls of hair and clothing. The attribution to Desiderio was proposed by Leo Planiscig in 1942, who presented it as the elder brother of the *Baptist* in the tondo of the *Christ and Saint John the Baptist as Children* (cat. 12), while also linking it to the *Martelli Saint John the Baptist* (cat. 2). This comparison was picked up by Grizel Vines, who likewise stressed the similarity of the demented look given to the two figures.

The depiction of the Baptist as child and adolescent grew remarkably in popularity in Florence from the 1450s (concerning the reasons for this development, see Aronberg Lavin 1955 and pp. 160–62). This boom in busts of the Baptist as child and adolescent both facilitates and complicates the work of attribution. Our bust stands

Fig. 88
Plinth with inscription
marble, bronze, second half of the 19th century
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Sculptures

Fig. 89
Desiderio da Settignano (after)
Saint John the Baptist
polychrome stucco
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,
Gift of Anna Case Mackay, 1969, inv. 69.253



out—even more so since its recent restoration—from the work of Mino, and not just from his busts of young children, but also from the bust in Lyon (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, inv. D. 382), which is marked by a certain haughtiness of figure, stressed by the fine, rounded eyebrows and an emphasis on bone structure at the expense of the softness of the flesh, which lends the face a determined expression. Jean-René Gaborit has suggested a link with the *Young Boy* in the Bargello (cat. 4), raising questions about the identity of the two models separated by a few years.

The emphasis given to the "naturalism, sometimes pushed to extremes" of the figure, was already underlined by Eugène Piot in 1878 in order to distinguish it from "the perfect grace and pleasing character" that was then generally attributed to Donatello. The recent restoration of the work, undertaken in 2005 by Marie-Emmanuelle Meyohas, has brought out the great softness of the modeling in the face of this ascetic saint, in which we may discern a subtle equilibrium between a certain rigor in the salient volumes and an underlying suppleness of the surface that softens the figure.

This stress on the structuring of the volumes suggests a date of 1455 for this work. Some of the details are used to reinforce the expression, as in the case of the two folds starting at the nostrils or the slender wrinkle on the forehead that accentuates the serious expression. As is often the case with Desiderio, the slightly astonished and fleeting expression is conveyed by a slightly open mouth revealing the teeth between two drilled holes and by a vague gaze resulting from elongated eyes that nevertheless allow the pupils to be discerned. The curl by curl treatment of the hair on the neck is very close to that of the youth (cat. 4).

Fig. 90
Desiderio da Settignano (after)
Saint John the Baptist
polychrome plaster
Museo Diocesano, Florence, Santo Stefano al Ponte

Fig. 91
Desiderio da Settignano (after)
Saint John the Baptist
terracotta
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Samuel H. Kress Collection, inv. 1943.4.83

The existence of two polychrome copies bears witness to the success enjoyed by this work. The first, from the church of San Donato ai Torri (province of Florence), may today be seen in the diocesan museum of Florence at Santo Stefano al Ponte (fig. 90). The orangey-pink skin, the habit of green camel hair, and the red cape animate a cast that is marked by modeling that is frequently heavy handed. Another version in stucco, from the Engel-Gros collection (Château de Ripaille, near Thonon, France) and sold on by the Galerie Jacques Seligmann, is now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (fig. 89). The polychromy is similar but offers greater contrast and, in particular, a lighter, pinker skin, and the presence of clearly marked dark pupils reinforces the dreamy appearance of the figure, attenuating the thickness of the modeling. In both cases, the busts have been transformed into frontal figures, with only the front part of the bust being worked; the Florentine work is hollow behind. Finally, there is a third version in terracotta (fig. 91) that may be of a later date.

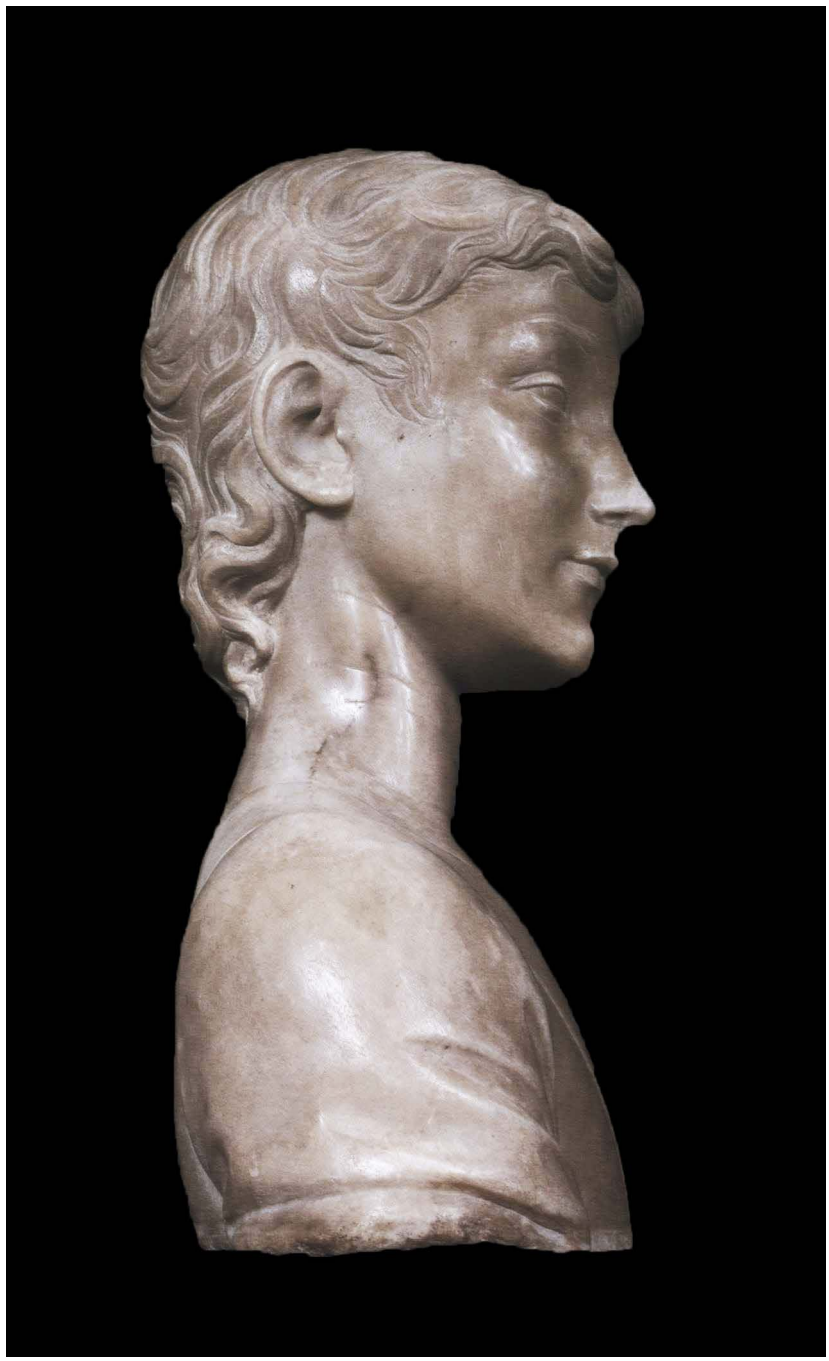
MB

4 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

Young Boy, ca. 1450–55

Marble, H: 40 cm; W: 34.5 cm; Depth: 18 cm
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence,
inv. Sculture 95

Restored in 2006 by Louis D. Pierelli
and Gabriella Tonini



PROVENANCE

Possibly from the former Medici collections; Florence, Imperial Gallery of the Uffizi, noted in 1813; entered the Museo Nazionale del Bargello between 1873 and 1879, when it is noted in the inventory.

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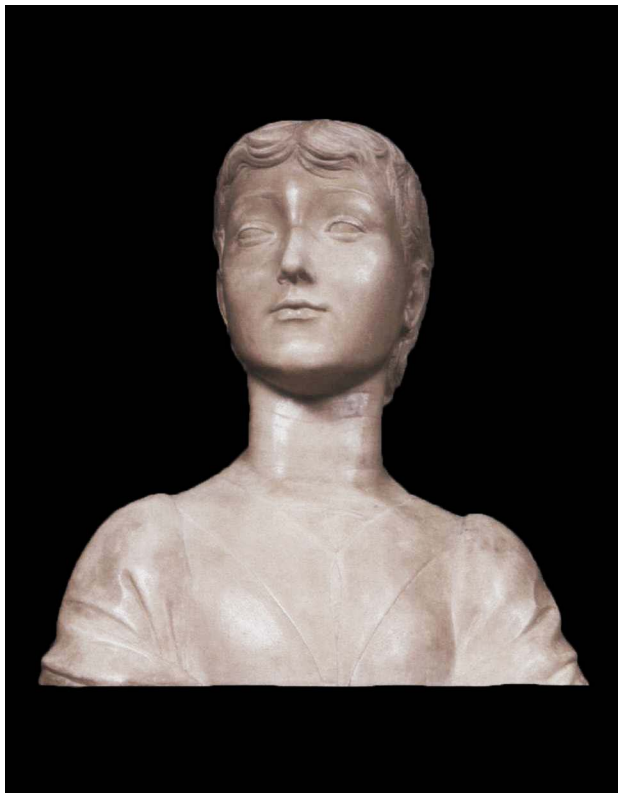
This bust is one of the first to have been attributed to Desiderio in 1816, by Conte Leopoldo Cicognara. He immediately questioned the function of these busts, "portraits from life of some young members of ancient families, in which the sculptor has sought to conserve a memory of the sitter, both for the display of art and out of devotional considerations" (*ovvero sono ritratti al naturale di alcuni giovanetti di antiche famiglie, nei quali lo scultore si è proposto di conservare una*

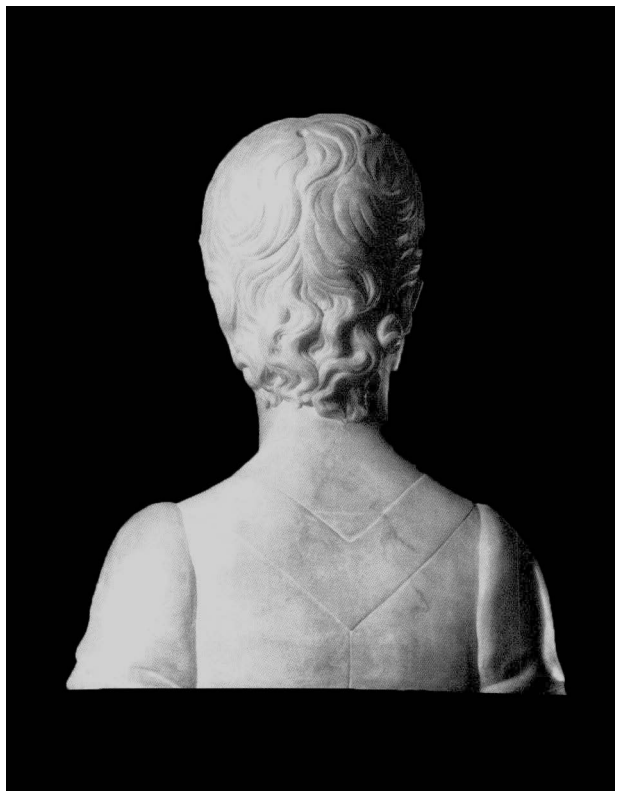
rimembranza di quel modello, sia per un vanto dell'arte, sia per un riguardo di devozione).

Cicognara also linked this work with the *Young Saint John the Baptist* from the Widener Collection (fig. 92), which at the time was at Casa Martelli. The two works share numerous features: a symmetrical position of the well-differentiated curls of hair over the forehead, a stress on the overall volumes of the physiognomy, with a rounded, smooth working of the jaws, and hair falling back over the neck in thick, sinuous waves to form a lively mass. The intense character of these rounded forms is strengthened further by the almond form of the eyes—the lower and upper eyelids stressing the edge of the eyes with sharp lines, with this feature being doubled above and below the eye with a clear fold precisely outlining the eyelid. The softness of the rounded volumes is still punctuated by straight eyebrows, the one on the right being straighter and slightly thinner, and by a mouth with clearly drawn lips. In 1888, Bode associated this sculpture to figures from the tomb of Carlo Marsuppini (cat. 1), probably alluding to the faces of the angels bearing candles. This comparison was made later as well by, for example, Negri Arnoldi (1966), who found in the shield-bearing putto on the left certain features described in the preceding lines: the composition of the lower part of the face and lips and in the both rounded and slightly flattened treatment of the superimposed curls of hair. This interest in rounded forms reappears in the softened line of the profile that includes these curls.

The rather hard character that the work reveals in old black and white photographs strongly accentuates the grayish tone of the stone as well as the sparkling highlights. The actual appearance of the work, even taking into account a probable darkening of the marble, in part recently reduced by a

Fig. 92
Follower of Desiderio da Settignano
(formerly attributed to Antonio Rossellino)
Young Saint John the Baptist
marble
National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Widener Collection, inv. 1942.9.142





delicate cleaning, gives a better idea of the fairly subtle equilibrium achieved between the rather powerful volumetric structure of this bust and a certain suppleness in the flesh that can be discerned underlying the polished volume of the marble. This sober appearance is further reinforced by the flat rendering of the edge of the habit. Seen overall, these summary features would suggest a relatively early date for this work of about 1450–55.

The young age of the sitter probably makes this a unique work amongst the male busts of the period, since all the other rare depictions of young men are of sitters who are no longer adolescent, whether this be the slightly older *Platonic Youth* (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. Bronzi 8) or the *Bust of a Young Warrior* attributed to Antonio Pollaiuolo (Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. 166 M).

On a stylistic level, there is a strong temptation to link this bust with those of the adolescent John the Baptist, which provided the sculptor with a similar theme. Even though the absence of any religious symbols or attributes clearly indicates that this bust had a secular function, it is nevertheless very close in style to devotional images. Moreover, in both execution and manner the bust recalls the marble *Saint John the Baptist* (fig. 19) often attributed to Antonio Rossellino, whose geometric structure evokes that of this *Young Boy*, although in a slightly harder manner.

This work has also been associated with the one mentioned in the inventory of Lorenzo de' Medici (Müntz 1888): "a marble head in the round by the hand of Desiderio" in the "cupboard on the attic floor" (*una testa di marmo di tutto rilievo di mano di Desiderio* in the *armadio della soffitta*) in the Medici palace, but it is impossible to be sure of this.

MB

5 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO (attributed to)

Young Deacon (Saint Laurence or *Saint Leonard?)*, ca. 1455–60

Not exhibited in Washington

Terracotta with traces of polychromy,
H: 55 cm; W: 54 cm; Depth: 25 cm
San Lorenzo, Florence

Restored in 2006 by Paola Rosa
and Maura Massini

PROVENANCE

Possibly mentioned in the inventory of the basilica of San Lorenzo in 1507 (fol. 12 verso, ASL 2634); mentioned by Richa, 1757 (in a tabernacle set over the door of the Old Sacristy).

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Among the busts attributed to Desiderio, the *Young Deacon* (*Saint Laurence or Saint Leonard*) is the one that most clearly raises the delicate question of the relationship between Desiderio and Donatello. Its history shows that this work was created for one of the major projects of the Florentine Renaissance: the construction of the Basilica of San Lorenzo, where, of course, both sculptors were employed. The first mention of the work (Richa 1757) described it in a tabernacle above the door of the Old Sacristy and attributed it to a master sculptor in Donatello's workshop. At the start of the 19th century, Domenico Moreni, doubtless referring to a document now destroyed or untraced, stated that this bust came from the chapel built for Dietisalvi Neroni, probably between 1463 and 1465. Mino da Fiesole secured a commission in 1466 to make the marble altar for the same chapel, with the Virgin and Child, Saint Laurence, and Saint Leonard. The work was in the end installed in the Badia in Florence.

The high quality of this bust has always been recognized, and until the publication of Janson's fundamental monograph on Donatello (Janson 1957), it had generally been attributed to the master himself. The latter art historian wrote of its "striking beauty unrivaled by any other terracotta bust of the period .... Softly rounded features, his 'Cupid's bow' mouth ready to smile ... the relaxed yet animated expression, the subtle air of sensuousness, the caressing treatment of every surface that seems to convey texture differences without conscious effort": these were the very characteristics enabling him to attribute the bust to Desiderio's mature period.

Margrit Lisner (1958, pp. 53–54), a partisan of the attribution to Desiderio, for her part stressed the differences between this work and Donatello's *San Rossore* (fig. 94): a stiffness in the position of the head, an inward-looking force in the volume. The fundamental link is provided by the *Portrait of a Lady*, called *Marietta Strozzi* (cat. 7): the two left profiles are compared, highlighting the highly similar supple lines. Despite the difference in material, numerous similarities are presented by the rendering of the volumes of the flesh on the face, the lips, the treatment of the nose, and the role of the slightly grooved eyebrows in the general organization of the face. Here, too, the lively handling of the rounded, superimposed curls of hair accentuates the simplification of the forms of the face. We should also stress the individualization of the features and the tension of the expression, revealing a moment of mystic concentration. At first impression it is also possible to associate the face of this *Young Deacon* with that of the *Saint Louis de Toulouse* made by Donatello for the Guelph Party niche in Orsanmichele (Santa Croce,

Fig. 93
Nanni di Bartolo (attributed to)
Saint Laurence, gilded and silvered wood (poplar)
Museo della Basilica di Santa Maria delle Grazie,
San Giovanni Valdarno

Florence). But there, too, leaving aside the differences that derive from the medium, the tension in the modeling of the face of the *Saint Louis*, especially clear when seen from the side, gives way here to a calm handling of the face resulting from a supple approach (especially evident in the modeling of the nose and of the mouth). This feeling is reinforced by the ambiguity of expression, which seems to oscillate between sadness and slight disdain. Finally, Donatello's polychrome stucco relief of the same saint situated above one of the doors of the Old Sacristy, part of a composition of *Saint Stephen* and *Saint Laurence*, is a more expressive figure, with a more accentuated modeling of the face and more vigorous forms than those of our *Young Deacon*.

While Desiderio is renowned above all for his work in marble, documents published by Arnold Victor Coonin in 1995 reveal that he also produced a terracotta Christ, perhaps similar to the one preserved today in the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris (inv. 2151; fig. 31), which provides grounds for an attribution to Desiderio.

Finally, the existence of a *Saint Laurence* (fig. 93) in the form of a wooden bust, datable to the second quarter of the 15th century and attributed to Nanni di Bartolo, another great master in terracotta, provides us with an even earlier reliquary bust and another precedent for this work. The figure already possesses that expression characterized by a "rather distant gaze and a slightly 'wilting' abandon" (exh. cat. Fiesole, 1994, no. I, pp. 47–48).

The *Young Deacon* is thus one of the first examples of polychrome terracotta religious busts without a reliquary function, a model that proved extremely popular in Florence in the latter half of the 15th century.

MB

Fig. 94
Donatello
San Rossore, ca. 1424–27
partially gilt bronze
Museo Nazionale San Matteo, Pisa

6 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

Young Girl, ca. 1455

Marble; H: 47 cm; W: 44 cm; Depth: 21 cm
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. Sculture 62

Restored in 2006 by Louis D. Pierelli and Gabriella Tonini

PROVENANCE

Shown in a drawing by Filidauro Rossi of 1753 in the Uffizi in Florence, in the large entrance hall close to the "Ponente" corridor. Entered the Museo Nazionale del Bargello between 1873 and 1879.

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Among the marble busts attributed to Desiderio, this *Young Girl* has generally been considered an autograph work in the monographs dedicated to the artist, although in shorter studies it has often been considered to be a work from his circle. An example of the latter is the detailed but severe analysis of this sculpture by Anne Markham (1964); she considers the work unsatisfactory as an autograph work: the surfaces are neither luminous nor lively; seen from the front, the expression has something absurd about it; overall, the sculpture lacks the pictorial qualities one finds in the left-hand shield-bearing putto in the tomb of Carlo Marsuppini (cat. 1) or in the right-hand angel of the tabernacle of San Lorenzo; and the effect produced by a profound play of light and shade is absent.

It is true that seen from the front, the face gives an impression of an exaggerated geometric approach to the figure overall, the chin being shaped of an almost hemispherical form fixed in a curve formed by the jaw, an impression strengthened by the soft and almost imperceptible transition with the powerful, cylindrical neck. But, as with Desiderio's other works, some affinities with the angels of the tomb of Carlo Marsuppini (cat. 1) were pointed out a long time ago by Wilhelm Bode (Bode 1888). The strongly stylized appearance is offset by a great delicacy

in the handling. A close analysis of the modeling of the face reveals a series of very light undulations—which brings the flesh of the jaws to life, framing a mouth formed of slightly wavy lips—and barely sketched out eyebrows, in a light relief made of a gently flattened form; these subtleties are made even more evident by the recent light cleaning of the work. These elements find some slightly softer equivalents in the face of the candlestick-bearing angel on the right side of the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo* (cat. 23), the modeling of which captures the light with its rounded forms and shows some details of the face to best advantage: the almond eyes, skillfully indicated with eyebrows outlined with well-defined contours, and the lightly undulating lips. These similarities are all the more obvious when seen from a low viewpoint. In this bust, such a viewpoint gives a very different general impression of the work: an enigmatic sadness (Vines 1981, p. 121) and, at the same time, a heightened equilibrium of the volumes that softens the expression by strengthening the majesty of the pose, the unity and the concentration of the face.

The quality of the profile, often associated with the contemporary paintings of Antonio Pollaiuolo or of Alesso Baldovinetti, has always been stressed (Pope-Hennessy 1996), sometimes to the detriment of other points of view: an elegantly rounded brow in a quarter circle, a fairly pronounced straight nose, slightly open lips, and a rounded chin, in a diversity of curves that weave through each other in an uninterrupted fashion.

The simplicity of the garment in this bust is worthy of note: here, we see none of the embroidery or brocade present in the later busts attributed to Andrea del Verrocchio or Matteo Civitali. The fairly open lacing of the bodice (*gamurra*) reveals a blouse at the center of the chest and emerging from the circle of the neckline. This garment, which was always white and of Cambrai, Rheims, or Dutch linen (see Orsi Landini, Westerman Bulgarella 2001–2002, p. 91), seems here cut into the marble and to have lost none of its lightness and fineness, its folds rendered so as to contrast with the sobriety of the rest of the garment. The sleeves, sewn on to the bodice, constitute another important feature of the garment, and the accumulation of folds makes it possible to animate the lower part of the sculpture while strengthening the general impression of weight.

The jewel placed at the top of the hair has been recognized by Paul Schubring, followed by Ida Cardellini (1962-1) and Jane Schuyler (1976), as an example of a diamond-encrusted ring typically forming a Medici emblem. This suggestion was rejected by Francesco Caglioti (exh. cat. Florence, 1992-2). And indeed, this ornament, a hair brooch (*brocchetta di testa*), frequently appears, along with other jewels, in Florentine female portraits of about 1460; see for instance, the *Portrait of a Young Woman* attributed to Paolo Uccello (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston) or the *Portrait of a Young Woman in Profile* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Jules Bache collection). As in these two paintings, the jewel seems to be made of a circle of precious metal set with stones and pearls. The identification of the sitter as Lucrezia dei Tornabuoni-Medici by Francesco Caglioti (exh. cat. Florence, 1992-2) depends upon an identification of this sculpture with a bust mentioned in the Medici inventory of 1492 as being above a door in the chamber of Lorenzo the Magnificent. This hypothesis rests on the unspecific classification given to busts of this type in the Medici inventories.

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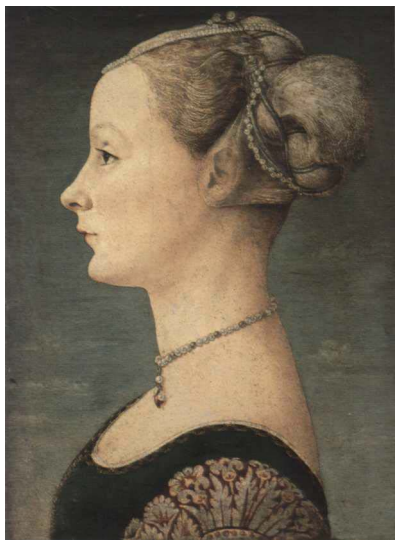

Fig. 95
Antonio Pollaiuolo
Portrait of a Lady, oil on panel
Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan,
G. G. Poldi Pezzoli Collection, inv. 0442

7 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO (attributed to)

Portrait of a Lady, said to be *Marietta Strozzi,* ca. 1460

Not exhibited in Washington

Marble, H: 52.5 cm; W: 47.8 cm;
Depth: 23.8 cm
Staatliche Museen, Berlin
Skulpturensammlung und Museum für
Byzantinische Kunst, inv. 77

PROVENANCE

Purchased by Gustav Friedrick Waagen in Florence in 1842, through the intermediary of the artist, Mussini, for the Berlin Museum.

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Waagen 1846, p. 253 (attributed to Mino da Fiesole); Bode 1883-1, p. 13 (Desiderio); Bode 1887, pp. 230–31 (Desiderio); Bode, Tschudi 1888, no. 62, p. 22 (*Portrait of a Young Florentine Lady*, Desiderio); Bode 1889, pp. 235–37; Bode 1892–1905, p. 96 (Desiderio); Bode 1902, pp. 207, 235–37 (*Marietta Strozzi*, Desiderio); Schottmüller 1913-2, p. 53, no. 123 (*Portrait of Marietta Strozzi*, Desiderio); Venturi 1908, pp. 425–26 (*Supposed Bust of Marietta Strozzi*, Desiderio); Schottmüller 1933, no. 77, p. 39 (*Portrait of Marietta Strozzi*, Desiderio); Planiscig 1942, pp. 31–32, 47 (*Bust of a Young Lady, so-called Bust of Marietta Strozzi*, Desiderio, between 1455 and 1460); Galassi 1949, p. 170 (*supposed Marietta Strozzi*, Desiderio); Lisner 1958, pp. 56–58 (*Bust of a Woman*, Desiderio); Pope-Hennessy 1996, pp. 191, 374, 377 (*Bust of a Lady*, Antonio Rossellino); Cardellini, 1962-1, pp. 184–87; Hartt 1961 (Bernardo Rossellino); Markham 1964, pp. 241, 244 (attributed to Antonio Rossellino); Bildwerke, 1966, no. 508, p. 91 (*Portrait of a Woman*, called *Marietta Strozzi*); Negri Arnoldi 1966, n.p. (supposed *Marietta Strozzi*, Desiderio); Seymour 1966, p. 240, note 21 (Bernardo Rossellino); Schuyler 1976, pp. 171–73; Vines 1981, no. 22, pp. 176–79 ("*Marietta Strozzi*," master in the workshop of Bernardo Rossellino); Poeschke 1990, no. 202, p. 142 (*Female Bust*, Desiderio); Markham Schulz 1991, p. 389 (workshop of Desiderio, perhaps after his death); Coonin 1995-3, pp. 155–56 (workshop of Rossellino).

Since the end of the 19th century, thanks to its undeniable charm and great celebrity, this bust has raised numerous questions concerning female busts of the Florentine Renaissance. One of the reasons for its celebrity lies in the text by Antonio Billi, "he made a beautiful bust of Marietta Strozzi in marble" (*fece la testa della Marietta degli Strozzi di marmo molto bella*), later quoted by the unknown author called Anonimo Magliabecchiano, and then picked up by Vasari: "he portrayed the bust of Marietta degli Strozzi from life, and thanks to her beauty, he succeeded excellently" (*ritrasse di naturale la testa della Marietta degli Strozzi, la quale essendo bellissima gli riuscì molto eccellente*). Bode was first to explore this mention of a bust, which he later attributed to Francesco Laurana. Then the discovery of another marble bust in the Villa del Boschetto, owned by the Strozzi family (fig. 96), prompted him (Bode 1889, pp. 235–37) to attribute both this bust to Desiderio as "a free rendering or old copy" and that of Berlin, identifying them both as portraits of Marietta Strozzi. He considered the work in Florence to possess a more pronounced realism that was close to nature (the lips, the jaws, the chin), whereas the Berlin bust, of a fine warm-toned marble, was conceived to convey a more lively expression. For Bode, the question is rendered more complicated still by the existence of a stucco, also attributed to Desiderio, given to the Berlin museum in 1889 (inv. 1557) and comparable in terms of conception, expression, pose, and arrangement of the hair. Finally, in 1914, Bode linked these to a third bust in marble from Casa Strozzi in Florence (fig. 97). John Pope-Hennessy (1996, p. 377), while indicating that the bust has certainly been reworked, rightly drew attention to the similarity between the mouth and eyes of this sculpture and those of the Berlin "*Marietta*."

This bust initially strikes the observer with its great simplification of the forms, especially in the lower half, where the bodice (*gona*) considerably simplifies the volume of the torso, the line of the lacing leading along a vertical axis toward the face. This effect, as in the case of all other busts of the period, is further heightened if we adopt a very low viewpoint. This makes it possible to reduce the massive and slightly disproportionate effect of the body with regard to the head, to give the neck and forehead better proportions, and, finally, to further dignify the sitter. This last point underlines the "official" function of these busts (see pp. 129–31).

Fig. 96
Desiderio da Settignano (attributed to)
Young Lady, marble
The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, inv. AZ021

Fig. 97
Desiderio da Settignano (attributed to)
Young Lady, called *Marietta Strozzi*
marble
National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Widener Collection, inv. 1942.9.112

The connection noted by Pope-Hennessy (1996) between the face of this bust and those of the angels on the *Tomb of the Cardinal of Portugal* in the church of San Miniato al Monte (for example, the crown-bearing angel), as well as the attribution of this bust to Antonio Rossellino, seems plausible at first but takes into account neither the delicacy of the modeling on the jaws and around the mouth, which recalls that of the face of the *Christ Child* (cat. 10), nor the almost melancholic character of the sitter, strengthened by the slightly sulky cast to the mouth. In this sense, the bust must be linked to the right-hand candlestick-bearing angel in the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo* (cat. 23), in which we also find this combination of a volumetric play of forms in the face (for instance the relationship between the ridge of the nose and the arches over the eyes—slightly flattened in curvature—where the eyebrows are but faintly delineated), a delicately astonished sensibility in the expression, and some finely treated details. A great sensitivity has been shown in tracing the slight undulation of the lips and in depicting the veil covering the left ear, just allowing the lobe to show through; this technical skill is one we find in painting in Antonio Pollaiuolo's *Portrait of a Lady* painted in profile (fig. 95) and in the *Saint Constance* (cat. 8).

The arrangement of the hair, drawn to the rear and curved to form a mass held in place by ribbons and strings of pearls, surrounds the rear of the skull and forms a further element adding to the elegance of the bust. This slightly asymmetrical element frames the face frontally, with the slightly rough treatment and drilling serving to catch the light and to reinforce the luminosity of the polished surfaces of the flesh on the face.

The problem of the identity of the sitter has been the subject of much debate. Marietta Strozzi, born in 1448, was the daughter of Lorenzo di Palla Strozzi and of Alessandra de' Bardi. While for Wilhelm Bode the age of the presumed sitter (16 when Desiderio died in 1464) seemed to pose no particular problem, Leo Planiscig (1942) was probably right to question the identification of the sitter for the Berlin bust with a figure so popular in historical romance, based as it was on no conclusive evidence.

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8 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO (circle of)

Saint Constance ("La Belle Florentine"), third quarter of the 15th century

Polychrome wood (linden for the bust, poplar for the plinth), with vegetable fiber, plaster,
H: 55 cm; W: 47 cm; Depth: 27 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Sculptures, inv. RF 789

Restored in 2005 by Agnès Cascio and Juliette Lévy

TRANSCRIPTION OF THE INSCRIPTION PAINTED ON THE BELT:
Front: "[sancta con]sta[ntia fil]ia"
Rear: "[do]rothei regis co[n]sta[n]ti[n]opo[litani]"
Translation: "Saint Constance, daughter of Dorotheus, king of Constantinople"
Source: Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, chapter 158, "The Eleven Thousand Virgins" (Saint Ursula and her companions):
"And Marculus, bishop of Greece, and his niece Constance, daughter of Dorotheus, king of Constantinople, w[ho] was to be married to the son of a king, but he died [be]fore the wedding, and she avowed to our Lord her virginity; they were also warned by a vision, and came to Rome and joined them to these virgins [the companions of Saint Ursula] unto the martyrdom."

Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend VI*, trans., William Caxton, London, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1900–1931 [1st ed., 1483].

COMMENTARY
The inscription is extremely fragmentary, especially on the front (where the last letter looks rather like an M, perhaps because of repainting). But the rarity of Dorotheus as first name for a man and his identification as king of Constantinople leave little doubt that the work presents Saint Constance, virgin and martyr, companion of Saint Ursula and daughter of the legendary king Dorotheus, as described in *The Golden Legend*.

PROVENANCE
Salomon Goldschmidt Collection; purchased at the M. S. Goldschmidt sale, Galerie Georges Petit, Paris 17–19 May 1888.

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Courajod 1887, p. 47 (*Bust Depicting a Young Italian Woman*, Florentine school, second third of the 15th century); Vente Paris, 1888, lot 61, p. 20 (*Bust Supposedly of Isotta da Rimini*, Italy, late 15th century); Bode 1892–1905, p. 178 (mid-quattrocento); Michel 1897, no. 348 (Florentine school, mid-15th century); Bode 1888, p. 215, repeated in 1902, p. 216 (workshop of Desiderio da Settignano); Venturi 1924, pp. 199–201 (Francesco di Giorgio Martini); Venturi 1925, p. 52 (Francesco di Giorgio Martini); Kennedy 1928 (Desiderio); Planiscig 1942, p. 32 and no. 62 p. 48 (Desiderio?, between 1455 and 1460); Cardellini 1962-1, p. 248 (Desiderio, between 1461 and 1464); Markham 1964, pp. 242 and 245 (not by Desiderio); Negri Arnoldi 1966, n.p. (Desiderio); Lavin 1970, p. 214; Pope-Hennessy 1974, p. 260, repeated in 1980, pp. 259–61 (attributed to Bastianini); Salvi, in exh. cat. Florence, 1984, p. 104; Lévy, 2000 (Tuscan, 15th century).

When this bust appeared at the Goldschmidt sale in 1888, it was described as a "bust, supposedly of Isotta da Rimini." This flattering name recalling one of the romantic figures of

Fig. 98
Giovanna degli Albizzi
polychrome plaster on wood, various materials, ca. 1860
National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Andrew W. Mellon Collection, inv. 1937.1.129

Fig. 99
Florence, third quarter of the 15th century
Saint Elizabeth, Queen of Portugal
polychrome terracotta
Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst, inv. I. 1575

the Italian Renaissance, a link that accords with the melancholic charm of this work, attracted an appreciable fame for the bust at the end of the 19th century. This celebrity is proven by the numerous copies made during this period (including a terracotta in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, inv. A.9-1916, and a polychrome terracotta sold by Christie's South Kensington in London on 2 July 1997, lot 142). But another consequence is that it subsequently provoked suspicion, clearly expressed in the important article by John Pope-Hennessy in 1974 on Italian Renaissance forgeries, in which this work was associated with the production of Giovanni Bastianini and considered a replica of the London bust, an opinion that was later widespread among English-speaking art historians.

The study undertaken in 2000 by Juliette Lévy, followed by the restoration of 2005–2006 by her, together with Agnès Cascio, now leaves no room for doubt. In its technique it is perfectly compatible with a 15th-century work (see the technical description of the work following). Moreover, the discovery of a fragmentary inscription, most legible on the belt at the rear, but also present on the front, has made it possible to provide an identity for "*La Belle Florentine*," thanks to the erudition of Pierre-Yves Le Pogam. The inscription clearly identifies the sculpture as a depiction of the daughter of Dorotheus, king of Constantinople—namely, Saint Constance. She is mentioned in *The Golden Legend* as one of the companions of Saint Ursula, martyred in Cologne. We are far removed here from the portrait of an aristocratic Italian lady like Isotta da Rimini or a young patrician Florentine such as Albiera degli Albizzi, so highly praised in contemporary poetry (Lavin 1970, p. 214).

As for its subject, this work can be linked to the busts of Saint Ursula and her companion at the Museo di Santa Maria Novella in Florence, dated to the end of the 14th century (see Salvi, in exh. cat. Florence, 1984, p. 104; see also the reliquary bust of Saint Mabilla conserved in Paris at the Musée National du Moyen Âge, inv. Cl. 2624 attributed to Siena, late 14th century), and to the bust of Saint Elizabeth, queen of Portugal (fig. 99; see Schottmüller 1913, p. 62, with an attribution to Antonio Rossellino, and the note by Ursula Schlegel giving it to a follower of Desiderio, *Bildwerke. . .*, 1966, no. 511, p. 91), probably once in the Carmelite convent of Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi. This last mentioned polychrome terracotta bust provides an older equivalent for our Saint Constance, both figures being saints and of royal blood. Schlegel suggests a resemblance between the face of Saint Constance and that of Desiderio's *Magdalen* in Santa Trinita.

Louis Courajod, the first scholar to study this work in 1888, rightly placed it in Florence in the second third of the 15th century. The same year, this bust was attributed to the circle of Desiderio by Bode, a proposal echoed by Frida Schottmüller (1933), while the master himself was suggested by Clarence Kennedy in 1928 and repeated by Ida Cardellini (1962-1) and Francesco Negri Arnoldi (1966) amongst others. And indeed, numerous features link this bust to works associated with Desiderio: the general form of the face, the outline of the lips, the broad brow of the *Young Girl* in the Bargello (cat. 6), the coiling of the hair held by a ribbon on the back and forming thick curls on the right side of the *Portrait of a Lady*, called *Marietta Strozzi* (cat. 7). As in the *Young Girl* in the Bargello, the profile is composed of curvilinear elements (one must not consider the nose, which is the result of a restoration). But the rather static nature of the volumes renders an attribution to the circle of Desiderio reasonable, even though we have no autograph polychrome wooden work with which to compare it.

MB and P-YLP

Technical Study and Restoration of *La Belle Florentine*

Agnès Cascio and Juliette Lévy

The bust of *La Belle Florentine* was executed using labor-intensive technical procedures that, in both form and painting method, are characteristic of Italian 15th-century traditions.

The bust is set into a poplar plinth and secured by five particularly large forged nails. Carved of linden,[1] the work consists of a principal block with a separate piece of wood attached to form the exterior part of the right shoulder and upper arm. The sculpture was hollowed out from the shoulders to the base in order to avoid cracking and perhaps also to lighten the weight. Also hollowed out, into an almost perfectly spherical cavity, is the crown of the head. This hollowing process necessitated the piercing of two openings. One, at the back of the head, is entirely masked by the polychromy. The other, at the top of the head, is sealed by a circular cover that can be removed to allow access to the interior. This covered but accessible space naturally supports the hypothesis that the work was a reliquary bust.

The naturalistic coiffure, a key element in the composition, is formed of composite materials. The locks of hair are made of bunches of dry grass or straw,[2] soaked in a preparation (*gesso sottile*, a mixture of calcium sulfate and animal glue that also contains an indeterminate quantity of egg protein), forming heavy masses bound by ribbons of linen cloth and small cords also coated with the preparation. Six metal pins hold the expertly styled, asymmetrical coiffure in place. All around the face, the hairline is built up in *pastiglia* (gesso applied in low relief). Finally, the neckline of the rich garment is outlined by a fine, lightly twisted border formed by the application of a small cord soaked in the preparation.

The polychromy, of fine quality, is undoubtedly the work of a painter. The garments, composed of an overdress embellished with sleeves tailored at the back, are richly ornamented to imitate a brightly colored brocaded cloth. The surface, completely covered with burnished gold leaf, is embellished with botanical motifs suggesting pomegranates and painted in a translucent red glaze. The design was engraved in the priming layer before gilding, as a guide for the painter. The same procedure, with ornament painted in blue on gold, was used for the fronts of the sleeves. Visible at the opening of the neckline is an underdress, also blue, which is closed by a fine lace drawn with an oil mordant and gilded. The inner surfaces of the raised panels at the back of the sleeves are coated with green (malachite).

In addition, sgraffito (scratching through a layer of paint to reveal an underlayer of gold) is used on the belt. The edges are decorated with a trompe l'oeil motif that imitates stitching in gold thread.

Three views of the work during restoration

Belt at the back, with inscription partially uncovered

Inscription after restoration

In the central section of the belt, an inscription is traced in the same manner. Finally, the gilded motifs on the belt and garment are set off with punchwork.

The detailed and almost illusionistic handling of the hair, as well as the representation of such details as the lacing of the dress or the belt stitched with gold threads, corresponds to the naturalistic treatment of the face, painted with subtly graded shades of pink, brighter on the cheeks and chin (lead white containing particles of vermilion and azurite blue). The painting, fine and smooth, is applied with perfect regularity over a gray-green underlayer that gives the complexion a natural look. The irises of the eyes are blue, and the mouth pink. The eyebrows, which have almost completely disappeared, were very delicately drawn. Finally, the hair, formerly gilded over a yellow underlayer (a mixture of lead white and lead-tin yellow), is bound by a white ribbon that was once decorated with motifs in a blue that has since vanished.

After receiving this original polychromy, the bust was repainted twice. The first effort, intended to imitate the early polychromy, seems to date from the 16th or perhaps the 17th century. The second, based on the pigments and the thickness of the paint layer, suggests work of the next two centuries. Old photographs show that in 1888, at the time when it was acquired by the Louvre, the bust was completely covered by a layer of dark varnish. It was then restored. The layers of overpaint and, at certain points, the original polychromy were partly removed. The painted layer was exposed, with the different coats intermingled. New gold leaf was applied selectively on the dress and the belt. Numerous tunnels bored by wood-eating insects were plugged. Subsequently, because the wood was becoming increasingly fragile due to continuing insect activity, new wax fills were repeatedly applied and partially retouched with color.

Today, after restoration, the original, highly refined, overall polychromy is again visible. The overpainting was essentially eliminated wherever original polychromy survived, but remains in a few places on the gilded garment (at the top of the shoulders), on the lower part of the belt, and on the plinth.

The restoration has afforded a deeper understanding of the work: exploratory sampling has detected minimal traces of underlying polychromy on the plinth, confirming an early date for that element. But even more unexpectedly, the discovery of the inscription, whose essential form is preserved on the back of the belt, has shed new light on the iconography and original function of the bust.

1. Analysis by Emmanuel Marulin, Laboratoire de Recherche des Monuments Historiques, Champs-sur-Marne.

2. Sandrine Pagès-Camagna, in collaboration with Christophe Moullherat, Report C2RMF, no. 2709.

THE *BAMBINI*

Alison Luchs

Desiderio is probably the inventor, and certainly the greatest master, of a Renaissance sculptural type that originated in mid-quattrocento Florence, the marble bust of a young boy. Vasari may have had such busts in mind when he praised "the immense grace and loveliness of his heads [or busts]" (*grazia grandissima e leggiadria nelle teste*) and "the airs of his women and children with their delicate, sweet, and delightful style" (*l'arie sue di femmine e di fanciulli con delicata, dolce e vezzosa maniera*). Similar words of praise—*grazia, leggiadria, dolcezza*—recur in the artist biographies of Vasari's third age, the culmination of the Renaissance, especially Raphael.[1]

Since the late 19th century, when portable Florentine sculpture of high quality began to emerge from all-encompassing attributions to Donatello, many busts of boys have been associated with Desiderio. The three finest are considered here. They show Desiderio's command of sprightly contour, his subtle gradations of relief that translate into sensuous surface textures, and his sensitivity to signs of inner life. The expressions range from an incipient smile to barely contained mirth to free laughter, but all are joyful. A father of four, who also shared a house with his brother's growing family until 1461, Desiderio brought an unsurpassed level of observation to the portrayal of children. His small marble boys appear yielding to the touch, with expressions that seem to change before our eyes according to illumination and our own movement.

Desiderio's gifts suited particular needs and interests of mid-quattrocento Florence. The city was the birthplace of the Renaissance portrait bust, foreshadowed in Donatello's San Rossore reliquary (see fig. 94) and perhaps in the Niccolò da Uzzano, but first dated in the bust of Piero de' Medici by Mino da Fiesole (1453–54). One purpose of such busts of men may have been to lay the foundations of nobility, by handing down ancestral portraits to the descendents of a new ruling class whose preeminence rested on wealth, ingenuity, and personal achievement rather than ancient lineage.*

In addition, the art of quattrocento Florence demonstrates a broad interest in images of boys. David, the symbol of triumph over tyranny, and John the Baptist, the city's patron, took new form as youths rather than patriarchs. And as Dempsey has shown, the ancient Greco-Roman Eros became the Renaissance putto, or *spiritello* (fig. 100) as contemporaries called him, embodying the volatile energy of a young child and contributing to the expressive content of works in which putti appear. The pioneer of Florentine putto imagery was again Donatello. The decades before Desiderio carved his busts (probably ca. 1460–64) saw the dancing putti of the Siena baptismal font; the frightened ones of the Cavalcanti Annunciation; the riotous marble infants charging across the cantoria in the Duomo, and the inebriated bronze *Amorino-Atys* (see fig. 26). Counterbalancing them are the more decorously joyful musical children of Luca della Robbia's cantoria.

Above all, the infant's form and emotions were studied in images of the Christ Child in his mother's arms, produced in terracotta, stucco, and marble as well as painting, for Florentine homes and churches. They belong to a 15th-century context in which childhood was first recognized as a distinct stage of life (Olson 2000, with references). Klapisch-Zuber (1982) has intriguingly suggested that late medieval devotional practices, encouraging the faithful to imagine physical and emotional involvement with the holy protagonists, may have prompted believers to look with new appreciation at their own children.

Essential questions about the busts of small boys involve their function in the Florentine homes for which they were probably made. If they reflect awareness of ancient Roman portrait-busts of children, the Renaissance busts are nevertheless infused, as Coonin has noted, with a liveliness alien to their Roman forerunners. In most cases we simply do not know whether a bust was commissioned as a portrait of a young son, or as a Christ Child. Furthermore, a hole in the

top of the head—into which a rod could be inserted to support a halo, as in the two Washington examples—could have been drilled at any time in a bust's history. Arguments exist for regarding these busts as portraits, aids in spiritual formation, or made for other purposes.

Certain examples were clearly conceived as holy figures: busts of the young John the Baptist, identified by a camel's hair garment. Desiderio's Vanchetoni boy (cat. 10) was paired with one of those, and thus understood as a Christ Child, before 1756 (fig. 101). As often noted since the pioneering studies by Gilbert and Aronberg Lavin in the 1950s, portrayals of holy boys appear to reflect advice given by the Florentine cardinal Giovanni Dominici (c. 1356–1419) in his treatise on the family, concerning images parents ought to place in the home as good examples to inspire their children. Boys, he suggests, should see their own reflection in the child Jesus and in the boy John the Baptist, sometimes together (a likely inspiration for the Louvre tondo; cat. 12):

"Have paintings in the house, of holy little boys or young virgins, in which your child when still in swaddling clothes may delight, as being like himself, and may be seized upon by the like thing, with actions and signs attractive to infancy. And as I say for paintings, so I say for sculptures. The Virgin Mary is good to have, with the Child on her arm... A good figure would be Jesus suckling, Jesus sleeping on his mother's lap, Jesus standing politely before her... In the same way he may mirror himself in the holy Baptist, dressed in camel skin, a small boy entering the desert...It would do no harm if he saw Jesus and the Baptist, the little Jesus and the Evangelist grouped together."[2]

Coonin has explored the significance of Florentine busts of boys, noting that their production begins about 1460 and ends about 1510, with the fall of the republic. He associates the busts with civic consciousness, citing Matteo Palmieri's praise for those who contribute children to the future leadership of a state. The image of one's male child

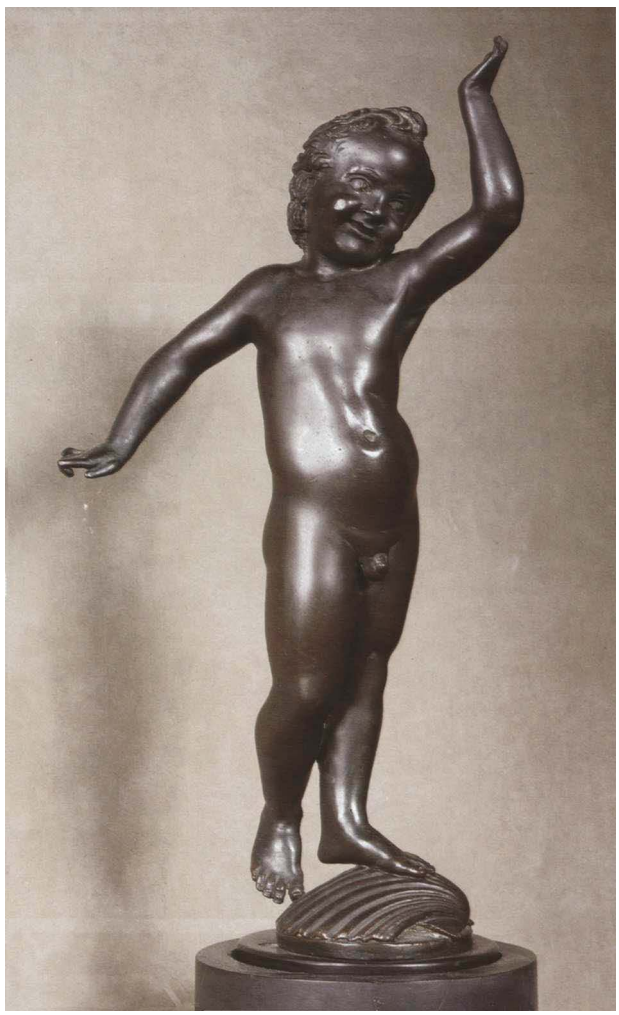

Fig. 100
Attributed to Donatello
Dancing Spiritello
bronze, 1429
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence

Fig. 101
Cast of *The Christ Child* (?) replacing the original (cat. 10) in the oratory of the Vanchetoni in Florence as it appeared by the 18th century

could embody hopes for family continuity and civic prosperity. Coonin finds the busts of boys so idealized, however, as to call their status as portraits into question. Beautifully formed, they also present ideals of child behavior: alert, energetic within bounds, cheerful, or gravely thoughtful. One wonders, therefore, whether some could have originated as sacred role models for boys. But one bust that can be convincingly attributed to Desiderio, portraying a child with a broad, full face, testifies to an interest in preserving the features of an actual boy, treasured for his very existence rather than for exceptional beauty (exh. cat. Florence 1986-1; no. 97; fig. 102).[3] The Vienna bust (cat. 9) also seems meant as a portrait of a unique and experimental character.

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* On purposes of Renaissance portrait busts, see Lavin 1970 and Alison Luchs, *Tullio Lombardo and Ideal Portrait Sculpture in Renaissance Venice, 1490–1530*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 17–20, 125–28.

1. For the terms, see Rubin 1995, pp. 120, 271, 376–77, 387, 392–93.

2. Gilbert 1980, pp. 145–46, based on Dominici 1860, pp. 131–32. See also Gilbert 1988, pp. 170: "La prima si è di avere in casa di santi fanciulli o vergine giovanette, nelle quali il tuo figliuolo, ancor nelle fascie, si diletti come simile e dal simile rapito, con atti e segni grati alla infanzia. E come dico di pinture, così dico di scolture. Bene sta la Vergine Maria col fanciullio in braccio, e l'uccellino e la melagrana in pugno. Sarà buona figura Iesu che poppa, Iesu che dorme in grembo della Madre: Iesu le sta cortese innanzi, Iesu profile e essa Madre tal profile cuce. Così si specchi nel Battista santo, vestito di pelle di cammello, fanciullino che entra nel diserto, scherza cogli uccelli, succhia le foglie melate, dorme in sulla terra. Non nocerebbe se vedessi dipinti Iesu e il Battista, Iesu e il Vangelista piccinini insieme coniunti."

3. John Malden has recently found documentation that this bust, which was in Paxton House at Berwick on Tweed, Scotland, until the 20th century, was acquired by Patrick Home of Billie in 1776 from the Gori collection in Florence, as a work of Donatello.

Fig. 102
Attributed to Desiderio da Settignano
Little Boy
marble
private collection

9 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

Laughing Boy, ca. 1460–64

Marble, 33 x 21.5 x 13 cm
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna,
Bequest of Gustav Benda, inv. 9104

PROVENANCE
Vannutelli, Rome; Eugen von Miller von Aichholz, before 1883 (Bode 1883-2, pp. 130–38, esp. 135); Gustav Benda Collection, 1892; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 1932.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY
Bode 1883-2 (the first known attribution to Desiderio); Bode 1887, p. 55; Planiscig 1942, pp. 37, 49; Cardellini 1962-1, p. 178 (Desiderio); Vines 1981, pp. 152–53 (Desiderio); Vines in exh. cat. Detroit-Fort Worth 1985, pp. 66, 184, no. 59 (Desiderio); Vines in exh. cat. Florence 1986, p. 239, pl. XXXVII, no. 96; Coonin 1995-1, pp. 61, 63.

Gleeful energy pervades this portrait, from the tousled hair flaring on the forehead to the drapery falling down the shoulders. A sharp turn to the left, doubling the ring in the plump neck, suggests a response to something outside the image—a concept rare in sculpture before the 17th century. The open mouth draws back to reveal the tongue and upper and lower teeth. High-set brows lift slightly toward the center of the forehead, and hollows rising at the outer corners of the eyes parallel the dimples in the cheeks, creating a harmony of forms that recalls the Mellon boy (cat. 11). But the locks of hair, rippling, twisting, and undulating, are defined with a boldness that matches the expression.

Laughing children appear occasionally in other quattrocento sculpture, such as Desiderio's own *Panciatichi Madonna* (cat. 20) and the Christ Child in the lap of his smiling

mother in a remarkable terracotta in the Victoria and Albert Museum, attributed to Antonio Rossellino. Could this bust also depict a boy Christ, a radiant model for a Florentine child who might, in Giovanni Dominici's words, become "captivated by one like him, with actions and signs pleasing to infancy" (*si diletti come simile e dal simile rapito, con atti e segni grati alla infanzia*)? The stone itself suggests an answer.

The marble is noticeably flawed. A rust spot marks the shell of the left ear, and the back has a brown blotch (though this may result from some application to the marble). A vein opening sporadically into deep fissures can be followed across the top of the head. Fine cracks across the chest are turned to good account as barely visible junctures between folds. The neck has a break, repaired and covered with coral beads before the late 19th century. Its cause seems less probably a fall (the bust is otherwise undamaged) or an insertion of a pin (there is no wider hole in the back, as in the Kress bust, to suggest one was inserted) than a weakness in the stone giving way. A sculptor might have hesitated to choose such an imperfect and unstable block for a commissioned work, but its creamy beauty could have enticed him to keep it for personal use. A private, experimental character, rather than an interruption caused by Desiderio's premature death, might also explain the lack of final smoothing in some grooves of the hair. The absence of any hole for a halo further indicates this is no young Christ, but a familiar and beloved child who inspired the sculptor to immortalize his joy.

Sudden and transitory, laughter is hard enough to capture with swiftly handled materials like pencil and clay. This heightens amazement at what Desiderio achieved, through powers of design and carving as keen as his observation. The open-mouthed, smiling infant remained a favorite theme in Florentine art for a century, as evident in the terracotta Virgin and Child ascribed to Rossellino previously mentioned, Raphael's *Niccolini-Cowper Madonna* in the National Gallery of Art (fig. 55), and in many depictions of the Holy Family by Andrea del Sarto. These works reflect an assumption that the free display of joy was appropriate to a Christ Child.

In its believable portrayal of innocent laughter this bust is unsurpassed even by Bernini or Houdon, who may have learned from Desiderio. But there is a fascinating record of its association, in mid-19th-century Rome, with the idea of risqué rococo gaiety. In Mariano Fortuny's painting *The Choice of a Model*, ca. 1868–74 (Washington, Corcoran Gallery of Art), the Desiderio boy is one of a trio of busts mounted against a pink wall in a sumptuous 18th-century interior, in which elegantly dressed connoisseurs appraise a nude model. The other two busts may be portraits of Louis XV and Louis XVI. The tiny inscription on the socle below the boy appears to read "GAUDENZA" (merriment).

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I am grateful to Claudia Kryza-Gersch for valuable discussion of this bust.

10 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

The Christ Child (?), ca. 1460–64

Marble, 30.5 x 26.5 x 16.3 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Samuel H. Kress Collection,
inv. 1943.4.94

Cleaned and restored in 1956 by Joseph Ternbach; conservation treatment in 2006 by Katherine May

PROVENANCE
Oratorio di San Francesco dei Vanchetoni, before 1756–1940; Eugenio Ventura, Florence, 1940; Duveen Brothers New York, ca. 1940–42; Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1942; given to the National Gallery of Art, 1943.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY
Richa, 1754–62, 1756, vol. 4 (1756), p. 92 (as Donatello); Bode, 1883-2, p. 135 (Desiderio); Paatz 1941, vol. 2, pp. 135, 137; Planiscig 1942, pp. 37, 49; Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 238–242 and plates 288, 291; Middeldorf 1976, pp. 19–20 (Desiderio); Vines 1981, pp. 94, 139 (Desiderio).

This bust of a child is the only one securely attributed to Desiderio that can be traced back to a specific installation in Florence before the 19th century. Richa in 1756, visiting the church of San Francesco belonging to the Oratorio dei Vanchetoni in Florence, saw "two marble busts by Donatello placed above the side doors that lead into the so-called Relic Room" (*due busti di marmo del Donatello sono stati collocati sulle porte laterali, che mettono nella stanza detta delle Reliquie*). One was the present bust, the other a bust of the boy John the Baptist, now attributed to Antonio Rossellino and also in the National Gallery of Art. That pairing, along with a resemblance to the San Lorenzo Christ Child (cat. 23, figs. 5, 48, 124), has suggested that the Desiderio boy must also represent the young Christ.

It is not certain, however, when the two Vanchetoni busts were first brought together. The church was founded in 1602, and the earlier ownership of the busts is unknown. The hole in the crown of the Desiderio boy's head, for the stem of a halo, could have been drilled late in the bust's history in order to transform a family portrait into a sacred image. The bust was also cut away at the back and fitted with an iron bracket and ring, probably to permit installation in the shallow space over the door in the Vanchetoni church. During restoration after 1940, the damaged back was completed with new pieces to give the shoulders a smooth and continuous surface, with a drooping rear neckline for the tunic. The tip of the nose is slightly chipped.

Bode in 1883 seems to have been the first to recognize this bust as by Desiderio rather than by Donatello. Typical of Desiderio are the deep chin and steep crown, with the head's roundness accentuated by hair wreathed in layered and interwoven tufts, drawn out in tapering wisps that swoop and flare on the forehead. Wide open eyes, set shallowly in the face, have fine chisel lines circling irises that begin to rise under the upper lids. The soft flesh around eyes and mouth, mounded and modeled with delicate depressions, creates an extraordinary sense of contained and transitory emotion. The projecting upper lip barely presses the lower as the cheeks begin to draw back into a smile, coaxing the viewer into expectancy.

Since the head has been set back on the neck after a break, it is difficult to judge the original angle of the gaze. The child appears to look slightly downward, like the San Lorenzo blessing Christ, but with a subtle quizzical tilt to his left. Vines has suggested that the same young model might have served for both the Washington bust and the San Lorenzo Christ Child. The resemblance in any case points to a date in the early 1460s.

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11 | DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

A Little Boy, ca. 1455–60

Marble, 26.3 x 24.7 x 15 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Andrew W. Mellon Collection, inv. 1937.1.113

Cleaned in 1930 by Edouard Bouet

PROVENANCE

Eugène Piot, acquired in Italy in 1846, sold in Paris in 1864; Paul van Cuyck, Paris, 1864–66(?); Charles Timbal, 1866(?)–72; Gustave Dreyfus, Paris, 1872–1930; Duveen Brothers, 1930–36; Andrew W. Mellon, 1930–37; given to the National Gallery of Art, 1937.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Vente Paris 1864, no. 1, pl. 1 (Donatello); Bode 1883-2, p. 135 (Desiderio); Tschudi 1887, p. 227 (Desiderio); Vitry 1907, pp. 6, 8, 10–11 (Desiderio); Cook, 1923, pp. 81–83; Planiscig 1942, pp. 29–30, 47; *Exposition d'Art Italien de Cimabue à Tiepolo*, Paris, Petit Palais, 1935, no. 1038; Seymour 1971, pp. 119–20, 166–70 (Verrocchio?); Rees-Jones 1978, pp. 111–12; Strom 1983, pp. 9–12; Parroncchi 1989, pp. 66–67; Luchs 1990, pp. 31–38; Markham Schulz 1992, pp. 184–85; Parronchi 2005, pp. 46–47 (a portrait of Giuliano di Lorenzo de' Medici?); Covi 2005, pp. 111–14 (for the Signa-Diblee relief).

This bust differs in many ways from *The Christ Child* (cat. 10) and the *Laughing Boy* (cat. 9). It represents a younger child—perhaps one year old—on a smaller scale, in smoother, whiter marble, with thinner hair, incised rather than modeled up on the crown. The unusually relaxed upper lip protrudes above newly sprouted teeth.

The smoothed white surface that has contributed to suspicions of a 19th-century origin (Strom 1983) seems to be the result of a quick cleaning for Joseph Duveen in 1930. But the Mellon bust is exceptional among Desiderio's works for the system of geometric harmonies that pervades it, what Seymour called "qualities of structure behind the charm of manner and anecdotal reporting of appearances." The chest and shoulders form a broad pyramidal base, crossed by the garment at about a 30 degree angle. The pointed chin and the hollows flowing up from the outer corners of the eyes seem to mirror the contours of this base, the peaked crown of the head to recapitulate them. The head seen from the front forms an elongated hexagon, widening at the top.

Yet the elusive expression—with the face turning slightly toward a left shoulder that shifts upward, the engagingly asymmetrical eyes, and the hint of a smile in the fine depressions running from the exterior of the nostrils into the cheeks—shows Desiderio's characteristically subtle sensitivity. The bust also exhibits his unparalleled mastery of low relief in the thin, interwoven layers of wispy hair and twisting fabric, comparable to the reliefs of Saint *Jerome* and the Pietà at San Lorenzo (cats. 15, 23). The delicate mouth matches the left putto at Santa Croce; the tufts of hair wreathing the back of the head recall the Vienna boy. The underlying geometry, while exceptionally pronounced in this work, has counterparts in the Santa Croce Christ Child with his diagonally falling garment (cat. 1 and fig. 24), and even in the skull in the *Saint Jerome* relief.

This bust deserves attention not only for its intrinsic quality, but for its apparent influence on Verrocchio. Key evidence is the *Signa-Diblee Madonna*, a relief known in two stucco casts (Allen Memorial Art Gallery, Oberlin College, and private collection; see Covi 2005), from a model probably made in the 1460s by Verrocchio or a close follower who had studied with Desiderio and worked from a Verrocchio design. The Christ Child in that relief so resembles the Mellon boy as to suggest that this bust, or a related model, must have been available to Verrocchio's workshop. And the tapering wisps of silky hair clinging to a rounded forehead, the low-relief brow ridges quizzically lifted above wide eyes bounded by broad, flat lids, and the small, pointed chin under cheeks barely penetrated by a smile all find an echo in Verrocchio's bronze *Putto with a Dolphin* (Florence, Palazzo Vecchio). For its quality and subtlety this bust has occasionally been attributed to Verrocchio and even to Leonardo da Vinci (Cook 1923; Parroncchi 1989 and 2005). Of these three artists, only Desiderio is known to have carved marble in this way.

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DESIDERIO'S RELIEFS

Maria Grazia Vaccari

In listing the techniques of sculpture in the preface to his *Lives*, Vasari places low reliefs in third place, applying the Florentine term *stiacciati* (flattened reliefs) to them for the first time. He considers them "very difficult for they demand great skill in design and invention, and as all depends on the outlines, it is a hard task to impart grace to them. Donatello worked in this genre better than any other master, with art, design, and invention."[1]

In Vasari's account, the artist's technical mastery in the execution of this type of sculpture is associated with an extraordinary capacity for representation, which he subtly evokes with the words "design and invention" (*disegno ed invenzione*). He uses these terms twice to underline the fundamental contribution Donatello made to the complete renewal of sculptural language, and his recognition of Donatello's superiority in this field becomes even more explicit in the biography of the artist.[2]

Much has been written on Donatello's use of flat relief and his combination of Brunelleschi's linear perspective with atmospheric perspective,[3] seen for the first time in the low relief in the predella below the niche of *Saint George and the Dragon* from Orsanmichele, a veritable manifesto of the new vision represented by Renaissance art. Given the vast amount of writings on this subject, I will try to avoid repeating concepts extensively discussed elsewhere and take Donatello's precedent as a point of departure and reference for some observations inspired by study of Desiderio's reliefs, in particular his narrative scenes and busts.

Donatello, who had many collaborators and followers but never founded an actual school, cannot be considered as Desiderio's master in a strict sense. Yet for Desiderio, more than for other artists of his generation, Donatello represented a crucial point of reference, particularly for works in relief. This remains true even though, during Desiderio's short life and artistic career, it was the works Donatello produced before leaving Florence, rather than his presence as an artist, that pointed the way for the sculptor from Settignano. A real working relationship, and perhaps even collaboration between the young Desiderio and the elderly Donatello, can be hypothesized after the latter's return from Padua in 1453.

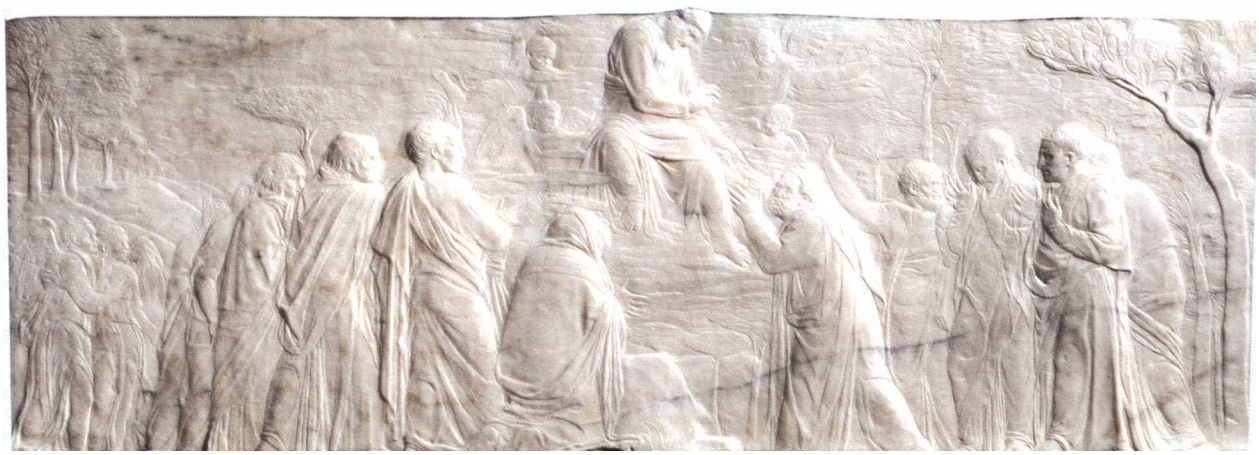


Fig. 103
Donatello
Ascension with Christ Handing the Keys to Saint Peter, marble
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. 7626-1861

Fig. 104
Donatello
Saint John on Patmos, polychrome stucco
San Lorenzo, Florence

Desiderio's activity is not documented before 1453, the year he was registered with the Guild of Masters of Stone and Wood (*maestri di pietra e legname*). As Markham Schulz has proposed,[4] however, he had perhaps already been working with these materials for some years in the workshop of Bernardo Rossellino.

Certain works by Donatello in Florence must have had a particularly strong influence on Desiderio's manner of sculpting reliefs. One can imagine that after the Saint George predella, which could easily be seen in one of the main streets of the city, the more complex image of *Christ Handing the Keys to Saint Peter* (fig. 103) must have been well known to Florentine sculptors of the period. But in San Lorenzo Desiderio would certainly have studied the stucco reliefs in the Old Sacristy. In particular the tondo with *Saint John on Patmos* (fig. 104) could have provided more than one suggestion for handling aerial perspective and a natural setting.

In the only relief that can really be called narrative, the Washington *Saint Jerome* (cat. 15), the rocky mass of the grotto dominates the scene. The sculptor has carved it into small naturalistic ledges, creating a sequence of diminishing horizontal lines, and cavities that produce effects of perspective and chiaroscuro. Set in formation within this natural structure are a small, foreshortened cross, two lions wandering along the winding paths, and the crucifix at the center that provides spatial coordinates for the event taking place in the foreground. At the entrance to the grotto the figure of Saint Jerome in prayer has the soft forms and gradual transitions typical of Desiderio's work. It is only his gaunt cheeks and deep-set eyes that show the signs of his ascetic self-mortification.

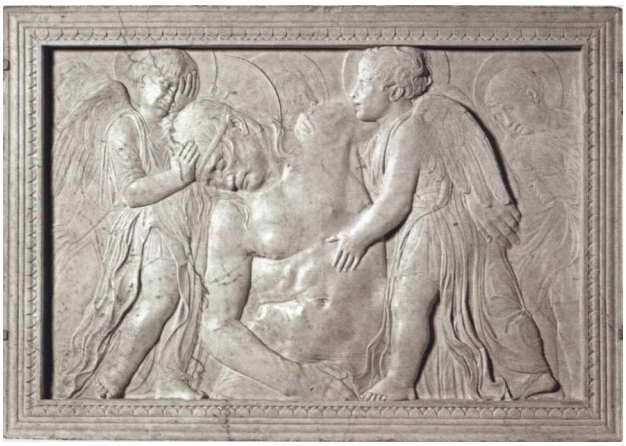
Inspired by Donatello's reliefs, Desiderio developed his own fully personal *stiacciato* technique, rich in pictorial effects that give his reliefs a sense of atmosphere, which he achieved by carving the marble with marks that read as filaments of light and brushstrokes of shadow.[5] What is not found in Desiderio's work, at least in this narrative genre, is reference to ancient sculpture, which is so evident in the figures in the *Saint George* predella and even more so in the *Christ Handing the Keys to Saint Peter*. The peculiar characteristic of Desiderio is his ability to transfigure the marble, which here more than in any other of his reliefs evokes the translucent quality and plasticity of wax, thanks to his seemingly tireless pursuit of perfection in the finish of his works. This quality was well described by Cristoforo Landino when he wrote, "Desiderio, most great and delicate and charming, with the highest grace: who polished his works over and over."[6]

It is not easy to identify particular Donatellian characteristics in the small *Arconati Visconti Tondo* (cat. 12). Rare both in subject and quality, it is almost a double portrait. It possesses the sense of atmosphere and naturalistic setting characteristic of narrative reliefs, evoked by the thin clouds in the background, which were also common to contemporary Florentine painting. The tender affection that unites the two children, which is admirably realized in a very shallow relief rich in descriptive effects of transparency and coloring, connects the Paris tondo with images of the Madonna and Child from which the circular form (often used by Donatello, even in small formats) is also derived.

Despite some uncertain touches in the figure of Christ, the relief in the Louvre attains a level of quality difficult to imitate. This is evident when it is compared with the relief of the same subject, in a different form, from the National Gallery of Art in Washington,[7] which adapts the composition of the tondo but also incorporates that of the stone *Young Saint John the Baptist* relief in the Bargello (cat. 13).

A different relief technique can be seen in the much-discussed Pietà in San Lorenzo (pages 54, 55, 230, 231) in which the accentuated expressiveness and a certain dryness in the forms—unusual for Desiderio, though compatible with the

Fig. 105
Donatello and assistants
Dead Christ Tended by Angels, marble
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. 7577-1861



dramatic nature of the subject—have suggested the master was not the only one who worked on the piece. The strong projection of the heads and arms, whose intertwined gestures link the three figures in an experience of affectionate and affecting devotion, contributes a physical presence that invites the observers' emotional participation. On the other hand, there is a complete lack of any perspective in the background and it is only the placement of the three figures on two different planes that suggests any spatial depth in the scene.

The relief is very different from the *Dead Christ Tended by Angels* (fig. 105), which was also very likely an antependium, and whose attribution to Donatello is not universally accepted.[8] In that work the narrative is developed by means of a series of gradations in the height of relief, from low, to flattened, to the incisions outlining the angels in the background. However, the parallel planes and more abrupt transitions of depth in the San Lorenzo Pietà show similarities to works produced outside of Tuscany. One example that provides a useful comparison is the *Blood of the Redeemer*[9] in the Ducal Palace in Mantua (fig. 106), evidence of the fusion of Florentine culture with that of Mantua through the mediation of Andrea Mantegna.

It may well be that, at the time when the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo* (cat. 23) was in production (it was set into the wall in 1461), Desiderio came into contact, perhaps in the same church, with Donatello's Paduan collaborators. First and foremost among them was Bartolomeo Bellano, who we know was in Florence with Donatello from a document of October 1456.[10] These Paduans were propagators of that spare and dramatic sculptural language that came to characterize the last phase of Donatello's work.

Compared to the narrative themes, which mostly played on the use of *stiacciato* relief, we encounter different, more highly articulated methods of relief work in the busts and profile portraits. Relief of this type was not generally of interest to Donatello, who instead made his innovative approaches to human physiognomy in sculpture in the round; nonetheless, at one time he was credited with the stone *Young Saint John the Baptist* (cat. 13), as well as the *Julius Caesar* (cat. 14) in the Louvre. In the latter the head, executed in low relief, stands out clearly from the ground owing to the fine undercutting, deepest at the neck, while the bust is rendered in high relief that fades away almost to nothing, creating the illusion that the form continues beyond the physical limit of the ground. High relief, on the other hand, is used for both the head and bust of the *Heroic Youth* in the Musée Jacquemart-André (fig. 60). The two different manners of representing characters from antiquity seem to have retained some relation with the iconographic sources for such subjects—coins and cameos for the supposed *Julius Caesar*, and full busts in the round for the *Heroic Youth*.

The model for the latter idealized portrait, in spite of the different form of the ground (which at some point was cut down), seems to have been the *Young Saint John the Baptist*, the *pietra serena* relief in the Bargello, which dates from some years earlier. In the Bargello relief the projection of the head and bust, together with the original polychromy and the naturalistic treatment of the boy-saint's tender features, gives a tangible form to the moral qualities of the patron saint of Florence, held up as a model of virtuous conduct and spirituality.

Fig. 106
Follower of Donatello
Blood of the Redeemer, limestone tufa
Palazzo Ducale, Mantua, inv. 11539

We should conclude with a brief consideration of portraits of women. The absence of reliefs of female figures that can be assigned securely to Desiderio and the difficulty of attributing either to him or even to his figurative world such problematic works as the *Saint Cecilia* in Toledo (fig. 67; discussed by Francesco Caglioti in this catalogue) and the *Young Woman* (fig. 16) in Detroit[11] make it impossible to know what technical and expressive means Desiderio would have used to sculpt female subjects. Thus, unless new discoveries are made, we will probably never know if he would have made use of high relief to give a statuesque effect, as he did in his busts of men, or whether he would have employed the same subtle and almost evanescent variations of plane typical of the Madonnas to animate the faces of female saints and ladies, whether imagined or real, as symbols and simulacra of a pure and ideal beauty.

1. Vasari-Chastel 1981, I, p. 128–29; "difficili assai, attesoché e' ci bisogna disegno grande ed invenzione, avvegnaché questi sono faticosi a dargli grazia per amor de' contorni; ed in questo genere ancora Donato lavorò meglio d'ogni altro artefice, con arte, disegno ed invenzione," Vasari-Milanesi 1878–1881, I, 1878, p. 157; G. Vasari, *Vasari on Technique*, trans., Louisa Maclehose (New York, Dover Publications, 1960), p. 156.
2. Vasari, *The Lives*, trans., J. & P. Bondanella (Oxford, New York, OUP, 1991), p. 147; and Vasari-Milanesi, II, p. 396. On this topic, see exh. cat. Florence 1985, pp. 7–47, particularly 27–31.
3. Among other contributors, note Rosenauer 1993, pp. 22–25; Pope-Hennessy 1996, pp. 13–22, 44–77; and more recently Motture in exh. cat. Leeds 2004, pp. 18–29.
4. Markham 1963, pp. 35–45.
5. On the technical and expressive elements in the relief work of Desiderio, with particular reference to the *Saint Jerome*, see Penny 1994, p. 14.
6. "Desiderio grandissimo e dilicato e vezoso di somma gratia: e el quale molto repuliva le cose," *Commento di Cristoforo Landino sopra la Comedia di Dante*, Florence, 1481, in Cardini 1974 , I, p. 125.
7. Cardellini 1962-I, p. 257.
8. Pope-Hennessy, Lightbown 1964, no. 2; Avery 1991, no. 58. Rosenauer 1993, no. 27 (Donatello and collaborators).
9. Vaccari, in exh. cat. Florence 1986-I, no. 35, pp. 145–46.
10. It refers to a payment, published by Corti, Hartt 1962, p. 158, doc. XX. Although Volker Krahn (in exh. cat. Padua 2001, pp. 63–92, particularly p. 63 and note 3 on p. 79) relates the document with payment for the group of the *Judith*, Francesco Caglioti, who had recourse to another document that neither Corti nor Hartt saw, refers it to the bronze equestrian monument of Alfonso the Magnanimous for the triumphal arch in the Castel Nuovo. See Caglioti's entry on the *Carafa Head*, the only part of the monument to be completed, in exh. cat. Athens 2003, pp. 198–200, and his entry in this catalogue. I take the opportunity to thank Francesco Caglioti for all his invaluable assistance.
11. On the issue of attribution of these works, consult the essay by Gentilini in *Omaggio a Donatello*, exh. cat. Florence 1985, pp. 396–99, and the entry by Phipps Darr, in Darr, Barnet, Boström 2001, I, no. 55, pp. 105–9. For the *Saint Cecilia*, see Caglioti in this catalogue.

12 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

Christ and Saint John the Baptist as Children (The Arconati Visconti Tondo), ca. 1455–57

Marble, 51 cm (diameter)
Musée du Louvre, Paris, R.F. 1626

PROVENANCE

Probably the sculpture of a tondo with the "heads" of Christ and the young Saint John that Vasari in 1568 mentioned among the possessions of Duke Cosimo de' Medici. If so, then possibly a Medici commission, although nothing found in the 1492 inventory of Palazzo Medici can be identified with it. In the collection of the Niccolini family, Florence. Acquired in 1901 by the Marchesa Arconati Visconti and bequeathed by her to the Louvre in 1916.

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Christ, on the left, is distinguished from his slightly older cousin by the cross within his halo. His childhood meeting with the Baptist is not mentioned in the Gospels but it was described in medieval lives of the Baptist. In these texts the Baptist was supposed to have visited the newborn Christ and also to have met him again during the return of the Holy Family from Egypt, by when the Baptist had already developed a precocious taste for retirement in the desert and adopted a camel-skin garment (Aronberg Lavin 1955 and Aronberg 1961). It is surely significant here that Desiderio shows Christ placing his right hand upon the skin as if confirming this important step in John's role as prophet.

The two children are so commonly shown together in European art that it is easily forgotten that the subject was almost exclusively a Florentine one before the last years of the 15th century and rare even in Florence itself before the middle of the century. The first notable Florentine painting in which the infant Baptist appears is indeed Filippo Lippi's *Adoration* altarpiece made for Palazzo Medici (now in the Gemäldegalerie Berlin, inv. 69) in about 1460.

The Baptist was a patron of the city of Florence but it is possible that the stories of his infancy were of special interest to Lucrezia Tornabuoni, wife of Piero de' Medici. Lippi's painting was made for her and her husband and she herself wrote a poem on the Baptist's life (Aronberg Lavin 1955, p. 95, note 53 and appendix), in which he persuades his parents that he must retire to the wilderness.

As many scholars have observed, since the studies of Gilbert and Lavin in the 1950s, Desiderio's choice of subject seems to follow the prescriptions of Cardinal Giovanni Dominici (p. 162). His treatise on the upbringing of children recommended images of the young Christ and the young Baptist and of the two together as fitting for young boys to look at and to model themselves upon (Dominici 1927; Gilbert 1980, p. 145). Dominici died in 1419 and it is remarkable that none of the images he commends can be dated so early, and some of them cannot in fact be found in any surviving 15th-century art (for example, Christ standing dutifully before his mother; Christ and the "Evangelist"—meaning Saint John the Evangelist—as children).

No other image of Christ and the young Baptist alone is recorded in 16th-century art and when such pictures of their embrace became popular in the 15th century, they were almost always shown as babies. It was also highly unusual for a tondo relief to be given any subject other than the Virgin and Child. It was, however, the increasing interest in the depiction of psychological interaction between the Virgin and Child that prepared the way for this relief. In addition, as Coonin observes, the meeting depicted here recalls the *Visitation* in which Mary and Elizabeth embrace (1995-3, p. 181), an occasion at which both Christ and John were (in a sense) present.

The tondo is of course especially well adapted to scenes of intimacy; the shape encourages compositional unity and focus—the idea of a close-up image of two figures meeting outside, as is suggested by the clouds and the breeze that lifts the hair. Both faces are transfigured with expression, with mouths open and brows raised. The delight in Christ's face and the fervent reverence in the features of the diffident but older Baptist are possible to imagine in very well brought up children. The three visible hands, however, have an adult eloquence, especially the Baptist's right hand, hard pressed against his chest so that the ends of his fingers are bent. The far stronger expression in the *Martell*

Baptist (cat. 2), sometimes characterized as incipient madness (for example, by Vines, in exh. cat. Detroit 1985, p. 182), is surely more typical of Donatello.

Bode published the tondo as by Desiderio in his *Denkmäler* (the photograph, pl. 291, is dated 1899). Soon afterward in 1901 the tondo was purchased from the Marchese Niccolini by the Marchesa Arconati Visconti for her exceptional collection of Renaissance art (Marquet de Vasselot 1903), which she bequeathed to the Louvre in 1916 (Michel 1916). It had probably been attributed to Donatello when in the Niccolini collection and Emile Molinière considered it to be by Donatello in an article of 1902, but J.J. Marquet de Vasselot (without reference to Bode) made a decisive case for it as by Desiderio in 1903, chiefly on account of the similarity between the open mouths, soft hair, and strong hands in the tondo and those in the *Foulc Madonna* (cat. 19). Apart from E. de Liphart's proposal in 1924 that the sculpture is by Francesco di Simone Ferrucci, the attribution to Desiderio has been generally accepted throughout the 20th century. An early date was preferred by Leo Planiscig and Ida Cardellini and a late one by John Pope-Hennessy but it perhaps belongs, like the *Foulc Madonna*, to a middle point in Desiderio's very short career.

NP

13 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

The Young Saint John the Baptist, ca. 1450–53

Pietra serena relief with traces of polychromy, 51 x 24 x 9 cm
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. sculptures 61

Restored in 2006 by Gilberto Lazzeri and Stefano Palumbo

PROVENANCE

Following the suppression of the monasteries by Pietro Leopoldo in 1783, the relief was removed from the Badia di Settimo, a Cistercian monastery near Florence, and deposited at the Ospedale degli Innocenti. On 5 June 1789 it was purchased for the Galleria degli Uffizi for 9 zecchini (Archivio del Bargello, inv. Sculptures 61). The work was documented in 1825 in the second room of the "modern sculpture corridor" at the Uffizi, where it remained until it was transferred to the Museo del Bargello in 1873. In 1887 it was placed in the Donatello Room. Its current gilded wooden frame replaced the simpler 19th-century version that can be seen in a photograph taken about 1920.

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The *Young Saint John the Baptist* was first referred to as a work by Donatello in the guidebooks of the Galleria degli Uffizi by Molini (1826, p. 54). The attribution persisted for most of the century but was not supported by Cicognara (1813–18, II, 1816, p. 70), who astutely assigned the work to Desiderio, along with other busts of John the Baptist formerly ascribed to Donatello. Noteworthy among other 19th-century comments on the relief are those by Perkins (1864, p. 149), to whom we owe the first critical interpretation and earliest printed reproduction of it, and Tschudi (1887, p. 21), who initiated a stylistic reconsideration of sculptures of the Baptist ascribed to Donatello. While the relief in the Bargello emerged with its Donatello attribution reaffirmed, the busts in Faenza and Washington were added to the catalogue of Desiderio.

At the end of the 19th century the stone *Saint John* in the Bargello experienced a period of great renown: it became one of the most frequently reproduced works of its type in photography and was also replicated in various formats and materials, including as a subject for a medal to mark the fifth centenary of Donatello's birth.

Subsequently, a more systematic reconstruction of Desiderio's artistic personality resulted in an attribution of the relief to him, with Fabriczy (1903, p. 374) emphasizing the strong stylistic, technical, and expressive analogies that exist between it and the *Arconati Visconti Tondo* in the Louvre. Later art historians, up to and including Cardellini (1962-1, p. 125), agreed with this judgment and estimated the work to have been executed between 1450 and 1453, a dating that can be supported.

In an examination of the 19th-century reception of Desiderio's work, Gentilini (1985, pp. 321–22) has more recently suggested that the *Saint John* may have been commissioned by Filippo di Ubaldino Peruzzi, a notary who worked for the Florence

Fig. 107
Desiderio da Settignano (after)
Young Saint John, polychrome terracotta
Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris, inv. 1979

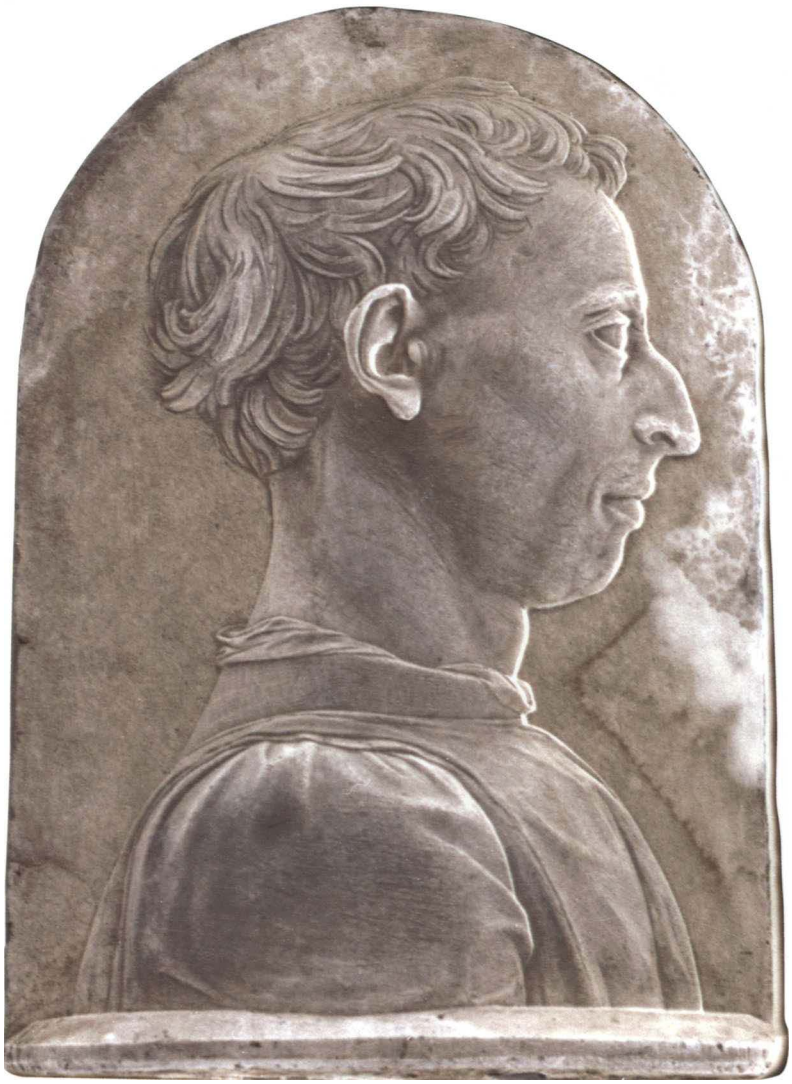

Fig. 108
Desiderio da Settignano (workshop of)
Portrait of a Man
pietra serena
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence,
inv. Sculture 196 (on deposit at Palazzo Davanzati)

chancellery and retired to the seclusion of the Badia di Settimo (Calzolai 1958, pp. 122–23). A man with a strong humanistic background and important public post in Florence, Peruzzi in 1449 had left a life annuity to the monks of Settimo, stipulating that the cloister of the abbey should be built to resemble those in the Florentine churches of Santa Croce and San Lorenzo, in other words, employing the most modern architectural language of the Renaissance. These circumstances provide tangible and meaningful support for the hypothesis that the work was commissioned from Desiderio, who in the following years would produce the greatest works of his artistic career for those very churches.

Among works unanimously attributed to Desiderio, this sculpture is the only one in which the stone is not associated with a decorative purpose. Here the surface has been carefully smoothed, giving an unusual polish to the material, which would normally have been left with a rougher finish to facilitate the adhesion of coloring. Nonetheless, the *Saint John* also originally had a polychrome treatment: Minute traces remaining in the undercut areas are sufficient to give an idea of how the image stood out against a blue ground, enriched by the gleam of gilding on the cross and halo. It must have resembled the glazed terracotta works of Luca della Robbia, except for their luminous sheen. The early if not contemporary terracotta cast of the *Young Saint John* in the Musée Jacquemart-André, with a green ground, testifies to the original coloring of the Bargello relief (La Moureyre-Gavoty 1975, no. 34; fig. 107).

Desiderio used various gradations of relief: highest in the bust seen in three-quarter view (rising above and behind a sort of convex frame-balustrade), and in the profile portrait of the head (part of the left side of the face with the eye also just visible from the front); and lower and *stiacciato* in the tousled hair, finely raised eyebrows, drapery, and camel-skin garment. The formula is similar to the one used in the *Heroic Youth* (*Roman Emperor*), also in the Musée Jacquemart-André (fig. 60), which is thought to have been executed slightly later, and close to the Marsuppini Monument tomb (La Moureyre-Gavoty 1975, p. 33). But the subject and the monastic destination of the little *Saint John* perhaps called for a heightened and more delicate naturalism, capable of inspiring intense emotional and spiritual engagement. This naturalism can be seen in the slight disproportion of the boy-saint's head to his rather frail and delicate bust, which alludes both to the asceticism of his life and to a body that is still growing.

The hypothesis that the *Saint John* is a collaborative work by Desiderio and his brother Geri, recently advanced by Darr and Preyer (1999, p. 725), was prompted by a reinterpretation of the 1461 document that records the division of the materials in the workshop—the pieces of sandstone (*lapides macigni*) going to Geri and the marble and works modeled in clay (*lapides marmores. . .et res sculte terre*) to Desiderio. This proposal does not square with the quality of the relief, which matches the best of Desiderio's works and is superior to the output of the workshop in general, for example, the stone portrait of a man belonging to the Bargello but now in the Museo Davanzati in Florence (fig. 108) and, according to experts (see Gentilini 1985, p. 318), the marble copy of the *Saint John* in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

MGV

14 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

Julius Caesar, ca. 1460

Marble low relief, 42 x 29 x 11.5 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris (RF 572)

PROVENANCE

The relief was recorded in the house of Baccio Valori in Borgo degli Albizi in 1591 and again in 1677 (Bocchi 1591, p. 181, and Bocchi Cinelli 1677, p. 364) and in 1681 (Baldinucci I, p. 407). In 1882 in the catalogue of the collection of Louis Charles Timbal (cat. 1882), it was said to have come from the collection belonging to Marchese Panciatichi in Florence. It was purchased by the Louvre the same year.

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A "panel of Carrara marble, about one braccio high, contains a most beautiful head by the hand of Donatello, an image of Solon wearing a garland on his head, of marvelous facture, because in the neck the parts of nature are imitated with extreme understanding, and the face seems to be of a living and utterly natural man" (*Quadro di marmo Cararrese, circa un braccio lungo, ci ha una bellissima testa di man di Donatello effigiata per un Solone con ghirlanda in capo de meravigliosa artifizio. Perche nel collo sono imitate con estremo sapere ie parti di natura, e il volto sembra, che sia huom vivo, & veramente naturale*). In providing the first known reference to this sculpture, which was then in Palazzo Valori, this description in the guide to Florence by Francesco Bocchi (1591) makes two interesting points: the extraordinary naturalness of the subject's physical features, useful in identifying the work, and the interpretation of the subject as Solon. That identification in particular is significant with regard to the provenance of the relief: it belonged to Baccio Valori, an exceptional figure in the cultural life of Florence at the end of the cinquecento, who had accumulated a collection of portraits of distinguished men in medals, paintings, and sculptures. This same theme was chosen by Valori for the facade of his palazzo in Borgo degli Albizi, which was decorated with marble herms of famous Florentines (Pegazzano, 1992, 34–35, pp. 51–71).

Bearing witness to Valori's particular interest in Donatellesque sculpture, Bocchi describes a Madonna by Desiderio in the same collection that was so praised and admired for the quality of its execution that some thought it to be by Donatello. As a result of this description, it has recently been pointed out that the work can be identified with the *Panciatichi Madonna* (Gentilini in exh. cat. Siena 2005, p. 490, note 29). The work is thought to have become the property of Niccolò Panciatichi, probably along with the stone relief of a woman in profile that was also recorded by Bocchi in 1591 and hypothetically identified as the Ford or Valori Lady (*Young Woman*) in Detroit (fig. 16; Darr, Barnet, Boström 2001, I, no. 55, pp. 105–9). Although only the woman is mentioned in the 1726 document that records the transfer to the Panciatichi family, by hereditary right, of Baccio Valori's rich collection of manuscripts (Bottari in Borghini 1730, p. 259, note 1), it is probable that the *Panciatichi Madonna* and the Solon, alias *Julius Caesar*, were included. In the modern period the profile relief of the man wearing a toga and a laurel wreath has generally been identified as a portrait of an emperor, perhaps Julius Caesar, following a reference that first appeared in the catalogue of the Louvre in 1897 (Michel 1897, no. 386).

Most experts tend to consider the relief to be the only exemplar of the series of 12 heads—probably portraits of Roman emperors inspired by the famous biographies written by Suetonius—referred to in a document of a payment made to Desiderio in 1455 (Corti-Hartt 1962, pp. 157 ff., 163 ff.). The hypothetical relationship between the series mentioned in the archival records and the decoration of the *studiolo* belonging to Giovanni de' Medici, in his palazzo in Florence or the villa in Fiesole, was already regarded with caution by Middeldorf (1979, pp. 297–312) and rejected outright by Pope-Hennessy (1985, pp. 282–87), who was also skeptical about a link between the documents and Desiderio's existing sculptures. The theory of such a commission has recently been refuted by Francesco Caglioti. Caglioti offers substantial arguments for connecting the sculptures mentioned in the 1455 document with a commission from Alfonso of Aragon, through the mediation of Bartolomeo Serragli, a Medici agent in Rome and the Aragonese court in Naples.

Of the many portraits of emperors that have survived down to the present day, none compares to this one for the refinement of

its execution and the effectual rendering of the subject's individualized physiognomy. It may be one of the earliest examples of Renaissance reliefs representing exemplary figures from antiquity. These subjects, inspired by coins, cameos, and humanists' compilations of images, enjoyed increasing popularity and, after 1450, became highly sought after by devotees of ancient art, stimulating production of similar relief portraits both for collections and for architectural decoration.

Like other works by Desiderio, the *Julius Caesar* was attributed to Donatello or his circle by German experts of the late 19th century (Bode 1892–1905, p. 26; Schubring 1907, p. 202), before being correctly identified as by Desiderio (Venturi 1908, p. 428); the attribution has gone unchallenged since then.

Compressed within the rectangular space of the marble slab, the bust overlaps the lower edge: if the relief were embedded in a wall to the depth of the ground, the figure would appear to be emerging directly from the wall. The *Prophets* by Donatello in the Bell Tower and the Duomo of Florence offer precedents for the naturalistic treatment of the face (Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 154–55). But here the truthfulness of the rendition (as seen in the marvelous depiction of the cheeks that sag with the loss of elasticity characteristic of advanced age) is never crude. It can be compared in some respects to the contemporary achievements of Antonio Rossellino in the medallion portrait of Neri Capponi on his tomb in Santo Spirito. Characteristic of Desiderio, however, is the extraordinary delicacy of the carving, evoking a cameo. Also typical of him is the power of the profile, which stands out with a graphic effect against the ground, and forms a more pronounced shadow on the neck, at the height of the Adam's apple, owing to the deep undercuts. As in all of Desiderio's works, though not unlike the toga that wraps the bust of Niccolò da Uzzano by Donatello, the clothing is tendered with the greatest refinement and sensitivity. The fabric, of arresting lightness, is draped in folds that cling closely to the man's body as though the air had been drawn out. These qualities connect the Louvre relief to works like *The Panciatichi Madonna* (cat. 20) and *The Arconati Visconti Tondo* (cat. 12).

MGV

15 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

Saint Jerome in the Desert, ca. 1460–64

Marble, 42.7 x 54.8 cm
National Gallery of Art, Washington,
Widener Collection, inv. 1942.9.113

PROVENANCE

Just possibly the marble "basso relievo" of "San Girolamo" in the "Prima Stanza della guardaroba segreta" in Palazzo Vecchio in 1553 (Conti 1893). A cast is recorded for certain in the workshop of Oronzio Lelli in 1875 (Bargello 1985). The marble relief was acquired before 1887 by Baron Karl Eduard von Liphart (1808–91), an Estonian nobleman resident in Florence. It was removed ca. 1891 to Rathshof near Dorpat (Bode 1891; Neuman 1900) and then ca. 1914 to Copenhagen where it was sold in 1921 by Baron Renaud de Liphart to Joseph Widener of Philadelphia through Rudolf Valentiner. Bequeathed, with the bulk of Widener's collection, to the National Gallery of Art, 1942.

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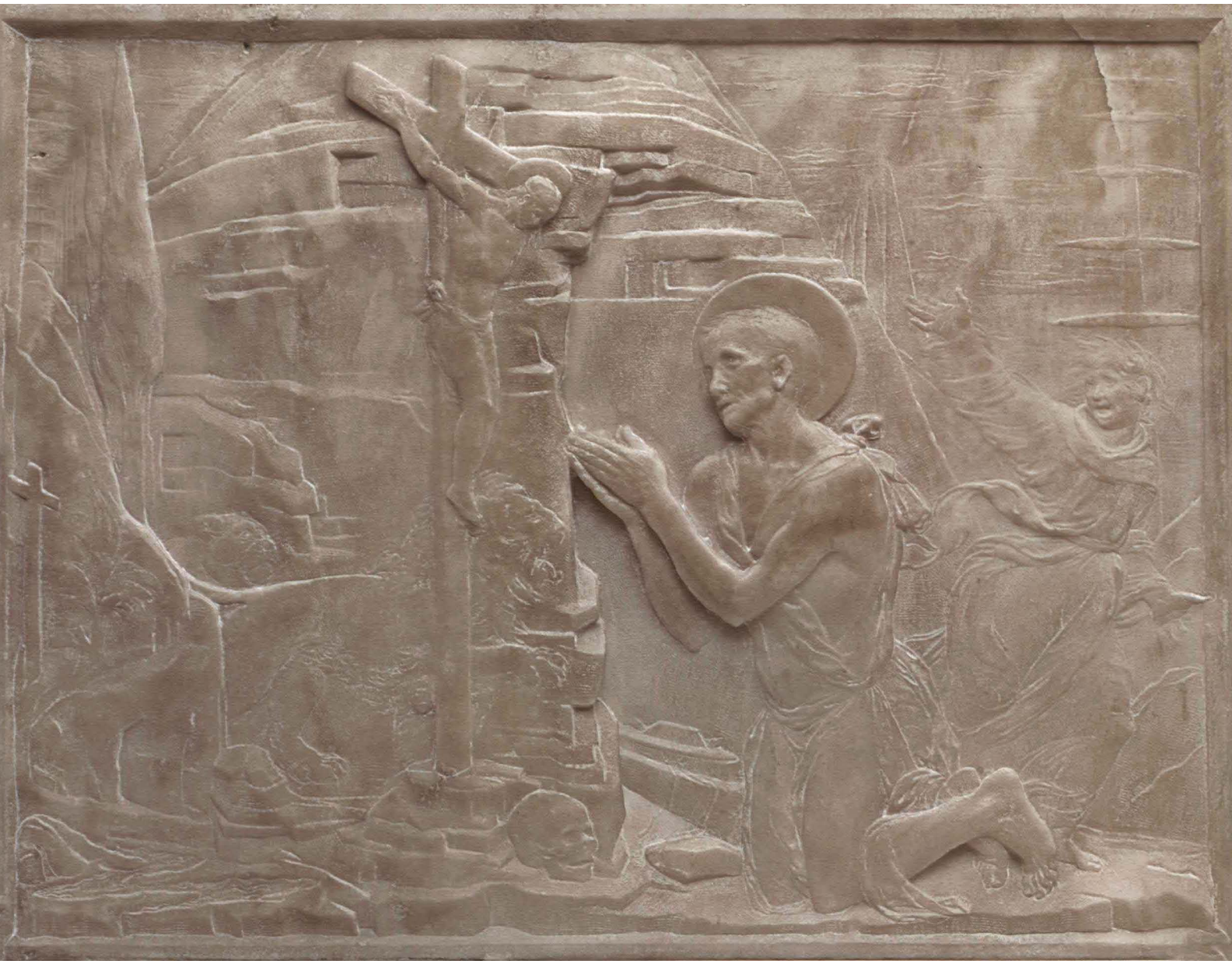
Saint Jerome kneels before a crucifix. The stone near the cross refers to the penitence of the saint who employed a stone to beat his chest. On a low ledge in the entrance to his cave is Jerome's cardinal's hat. Jerome is too absorbed in his devotions to notice the growling lion, which alarms the novice monk who hurries away on the right. The lion raises his right paw, which is wounded with a thorn. Unusually, a lioness accompanies the lion, her unhappy face behind his tail. The lioness is also found in a painting by Filippo Lippi, who also had the unusual idea of combining the representation of Jerome in penitence with the story of his care for the lion (Wittkower 1971–1972; for the Lippi see Ruda 1993, no. 15). But no one had previously combined the stories in the way we see in Desiderio's relief.

With the exception of the foreshortened arm of the cross pointing to the right and the receding shelf in the entrance to the cave pointing to the left, the artist has avoided orthogonal lines and recession is indicated by changes of scale, some of them schematic. In one area the space seems confusing. Just beyond a winding stream on the left, a track curls up the steep hillside. A cross beside it perhaps indicates the proximity of a hermitage. Rectangular openings in the rocks nearby indicate caves where the monks live. But the size of the lion is completely inconsistent with this interpretation of the landscape forms. The stratified structure of the rocks derives from Filippo Lippi and so too does the intricate complexity of the spatial construction, which (together with similar inconsistencies) is a feature of the *Adoration* altarpiece made for Palazzo Medici in about 1460 (Ruda 1993, no. 51).

That the relief is by Desiderio seems clear from many stylistic features, perhaps especially the carving of Jerome's soft drapery as it hangs under his arm. But there is no other relief by him of this kind. It was first published by Bode as a masterpiece by Desiderio in his history of Renaissance sculpture in 1887; he also included a photograph of a plaster cast of it in his great folio volumes issued between 1892 and 1905. In addition, in an essay, reprinted in 1902 but written before 1891, he referred with affection to its first recorded owner's belief that it was the work of Pierino da Vinci, an opinion that had been shared apparently by Cavalcaselle (Bode 1887, 1892–1905, 1902). But, before Bode, the relief seems generally to have been regarded as a Donatello. Some uncertainty about the attribution was expressed by Adolfo Venturi (1908) and by Schubring (1907), but they had almost certainly not seen it. Valentiner himself wondered whether it might be by Francesco di Giorgio (Valentiner 1928). Swarzenski (1943) accepted it, but proposed that Benedetto da Maiano completed the landscape after Desiderio's death. Goldscheider (1944) argued that it was the work of a minor follower of Donatello, Gregorio di Allegretto. But the confident attribution to Desiderio by Ulrich Middeldorf in 1940 and his reasons for its being a late work carried far more weight. Leo Planiscig (1941) also accepted it, albeit as an early work. The sculpture was also accepted by John Pope-Hennessy (1996), by Ida Cardellini in her monograph (1962-1), and by Grizel Vines in her thesis (1981). Only one major scholar has expressed doubts concerning it in recent



decades, and these concern its conservation and its status rather than the attribution.

Rudolf Wittkower believed that a version of the relief acquired by Michael Hall in Florence not long before 1970 was of identical quality and maintained that it was "difficult to decide" which of the two was carved by Desiderio from the "terracotta or wax model that served him and his assistants" (1971–1972; compare to 1977). He also proposed that the surface of the Washington relief had acquired its "softness and sfumato" from "repeated cleaning and washing" since the 1890s. There is no evidence for this claim and the numerous traces of the fine claw chisel that animate the Washington relief would have been worn away by any cleaning that was abrasive enough to delete details and certainly by the weathering to which Vines claimed that the sculpture had been subjected. It is indeed precisely the extraordinary textures of the tooling in the Washington relief that account for what Pope-Hennessy justly isolated as the special quality of this work: its "visual half-statement" and "rendering of atmosphere" (1996). It is perhaps best understood as a sort of deliberate "non-finito" devised to enhance the aerial perspective as well as to provide quivering textual contrasts (Penny 1994).

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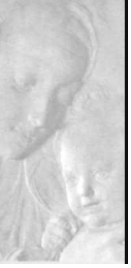


THE MADONNAS
Giancarlo Gentilini

As Vasari suggests with reference to the Madonna in the Marsuppini tomb (cat. I; fig. 24), Desiderio's ability to imitate the style of Donatello is apparent above all in the reliefs of the Virgin and Child. This iconographic type had long been familiar, particularly in images for domestic devotion. Desiderio, using the *stiacciato* technique with original and surprising results, reinterpreted the compositions of Donatello in a more natural, "delicate," and "charming" manner (Cardellini 1962-1, passim; Negri Arnoldi 2003), developing the pictorial, spatial, and atmospheric possibilities with great success.

It is thus easy to understand how a small marble of extraordinary refinement, the famous *Del Pugliese-Dudley Madonna* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. A.84-1927), should long have been attributed to Desiderio. This work, which has only recently been returned to the catalogue of Donatello (ca. 1440; Caglioti, in exh. cat. Florence, 1992-1, pp. 72–78), became an archetype for innumerable variants and a point of departure for numerous experiments by Desiderio, as is also evident in an energetic study in pen and ink (fig. 109; Goldner 1989; Angelini, in exh. cat. Florence, 1986-3, pp. 54–55, note 35). Desiderio's related works are *The Panciatichi Madonna* (cat. 20), an autograph masterpiece of the sculptor's late maturity (ca. 1460) as attested by the delicate, airy forms and the vivacious expressions; the *Dreyfus Madonna* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. A3-1968), a faithful copy of Donatello's prototype that has with some justification been assigned to Desiderio's brother Geri; and a more modest half-length version (Museo Civico Medievale, Bologna) attributed to Francesco di Simone Ferrucci (ca. 1455/60), who appears to have worked with the Settignano artists in his youth.

Payments made to Desiderio in April 1455 for a marble Madonna commissioned by the art dealer Bartolomeo Serragli, along with the full stylistic autonomy evident, in spite of its Donatellesque inspiration, in the Turin Madonna of the mid-1450s (cat. 16), suggest that this type of production was by then already flourishing in the workshop near Santa Trinita. At that time the workshop was still shared with Geri, who specialized in works in sandstone. Geri is the possible author of two

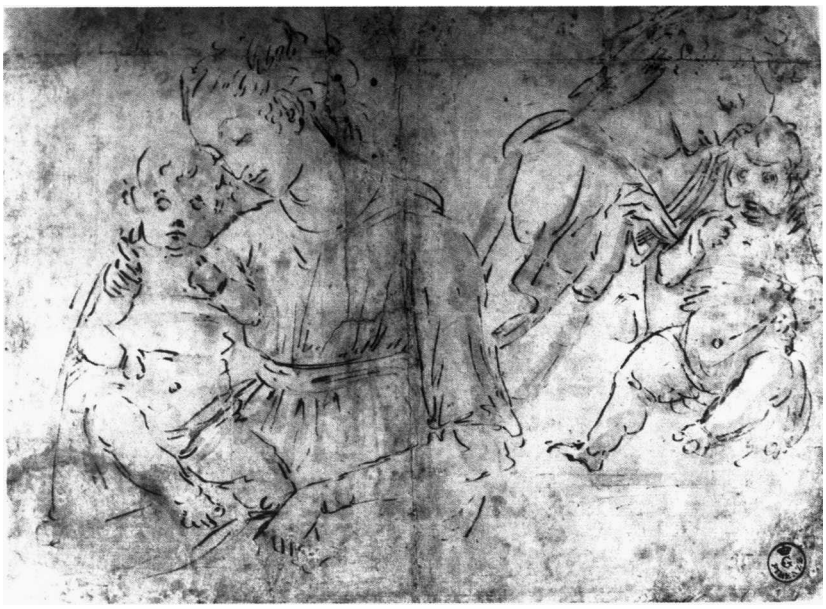


Fig. 109
Desiderio da Settignano
Two Studies of Reliefs Showing the Virgin and Child
pen on white paper, ca. 1460
Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence, inv. 38 F (recto)

Madonna and Child reliefs in *pietra serena* from about 1452/53—the fragment in the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Lyon (cat. 18) and a small, highly original panel in the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 110), where it is wrongly regarded as a 19th-century fake (Pope-Hennessey, Lightbown 1964, pp. 691–92, note 740). Both share, and probably anticipate, certain formal solutions seen in the Turin Madonna (cat. 16) and the more mature and complex *Foulc Madonna* (cat. 19). The latter was sculpted by Desiderio in the second half of the 1450s, but in a harsher and more awkward style of drawing, with some motifs, such as the fine, elongated shape of the eyes, uncharacteristic of his autograph works. These characteristics are also evident in a marble relief of the Madonna adoring the Child, which is more ambitious in its complicated foreshortening, in the rich, detailed decoration of the Virgin's dress embroidered with angels, and in the background in which two seraphim appear tousled by the wind. This work is the *Alberti Madonna*, also in the Victoria and Albert Museum (fig. 112) and the subject of much debate (Pope-Hennessy, Lightbown 1964, pp. 142–43, note 117). It may well be a collaborative production by the two brothers of about 1455, at a moment of particular affinity with the rare *stiacciato* reliefs of Antonio Rossellino, such as the *Morgan Madonna* (The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, inv. AZ 069; Pope-Hennessy 1970).

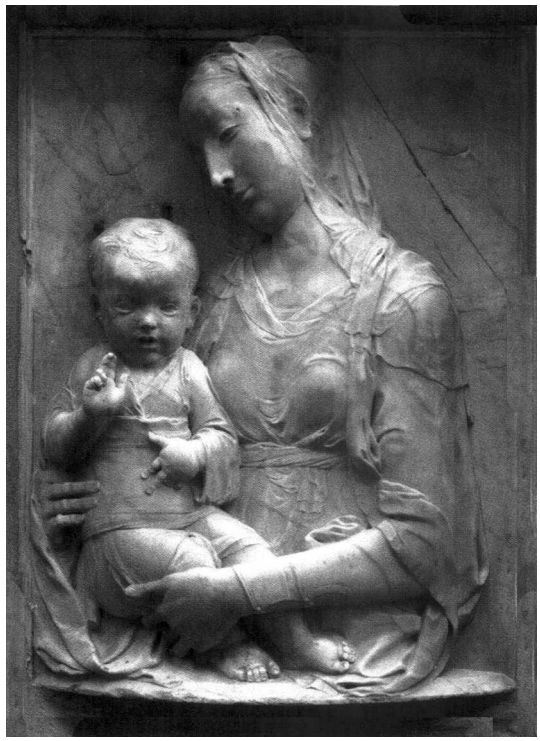
With the exception of the relief in Lyon, whose damaged state may date from the time of its origin, each of the works mentioned was replicated in several stucco casts (Middeldorf 1978; Strom 1982). Many of these were supplied to Neri di Bicci (for example, fig. 111), whose workshop journal records that he painted such works, and often framed and resold them on his own account (Gentilini 1993). His journal entries may correspond to certain replicas of the *Alberti Madonna* in 1459 (Pinacoteca, Ancona, and private collection; Tartuferi 1991, pp. 87–90)—which also served as a model for several stucco versions with polychromy attributable to Pseudo Pier Francesco Fiorentino (Volpi sales, New York, 1916; Semenzato, Venice 2002) or other less readily identifiable painters (Victoria and

Fig. 110
Desiderio and Geri da Settignano (attributed to)
The Madonna and Child
pietra serena, ca. 1452–53
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. 7582-1861

Fig. 111
After Desiderio da Settignano (relief),
Neri di Bicci (polychromy)
The Virgin and Child (replica of *The Turin Madonna*)
polychrome stucco, 1455—60
private collection

Fig. 112
Desiderio and Geri da Settignano
Madonna Adoring the Child between Two Seraphim
(The Alberti Madonna)
marble, ca. 1455
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. 66-1866

Fig. 113
Sculptor working in the style of Desiderio da Settignano
(Geri da Settignano?)
The Madonna and Child between Two Adoring Angels
(The Martelli Madonna)
marble, ca. 1460–65
Scolopi Convent, Florence
(tabernacle at Via Martelli 9)



Albert Museum, London; Biblioteca Roncioniana, Prato)—the Turin Madonna in 1462 (cats. 16, 17), and *The Foulc Madonna* in 1465 (cat. 19).

More difficult to resolve is the authorship of several marble works sometimes attributed to Desiderio, but quite possibly executed by his collaborators or pupils. Among the most important is the sophisticated *Beauregard Madonna* (Norton Simon Foundation, Pasadena, inv. F.1965.1.108.5; Avery 1976), which is perhaps a production of Verrocchio's earliest days in Desiderio's studio (ca. 1458/60), as has already been proposed (Pope-Hennessy 1988). As such it would form a link between the Madonna in the Marsuppini tomb (fig. 24), ascribed by some early sources to the young Verrocchio, and a common Verrocchiesque composition known as the *Madonna of the Cushion* (earliest example in the Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham, inv. 1895.85). A second such debated work, a delicate *Madonna and Child* in a *stiacciato* perspectival setting (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. 7631-1861), could be assigned to the hand of Domenico Rosselli, who was often to repeat its more characteristic compositional features (Pisani 2001), at a time when the artist probably frequented Desiderio's workshop (ca. 1460). A third work in this class is the exuberant, highly refined *Martelli Madonna* (fig. 113; Negri Arnoldi 2003), which might be proposed as the fascinating, final work in the mysterious career of Geri da Settignano (ca. 1460/65).

16 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

Madonna and Child (The Turin Madonna), early 1450s

Marble, 61 x 36 cm
Galleria Sabauda, Turin, inv. 7

PROVENANCE
Collection of the antique dealer Stefano (?) Frugoni in Florence; purchased in 1850 by the baron Hector de Garriod for the Royal Art Gallery of Turin.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Bode 1887, p. 56 (Desiderio); Giglioli 1915, pp. 149–54 (Antonio Rossellino); Cardellini 1962-1, p. 144 (Desiderio); Gabrielli 1971, p. 261 (19th-century copy from Desiderio) (with complete previous bibliography); Pope-Hennessy 1974, pp. 238–39 (Desiderio); La Moureyre-Gavoty 1975, no. 36 (Desiderio); Middeldorf 1978, pp. 77–84; Maek-Gerard 1981, pp. 21–25 (Desiderio da Settignano); Strom 1982, p. 132 (19th-century copy after Desiderio); Neri Lusanna, Faedo 1986, II, pp. 258–59 (Desiderio); Durey, in exh. cat. Lyon 1987, pp. 110–11 (uncertain between Desiderio original and 19th-century copy after Desiderio); Krahn entry no. 4 in Krahn, Lessmann 1987, pp. 29–32; Kecks 1988, pp. 99–100, 118, 138–39; Markham Schulz 1991, p. 387 (19th-century forgery); Markham Schulz 1991, p. 186; Gentilini 1992, pp. 38, 157 (Desiderio); Penny 1992, p. 29 no. 26 (Desiderio); Avery, Butterfield, Middeldorf 2001, no. 5 (uncertain between Desiderio original and 19th-century copy from Desiderio); Negri Arnoldi 2003, p. 59 (Desiderio).

This relief, formerly owned by the art dealer Frugoni, was purchased in Florence in 1850 by Baron Garriod as a work by Donatello, and recorded as such in the three editions of *Indicazione sommaria dei quadri e capi d'arte della R. Pinacoteca di Torino* in 1866, 1879, and 1884. In 1899 the guidebook to the museum still ascribed it to Donatello, but noted several authoritative opinions to the contrary. Meanwhile, the German expert Bode had attributed the work to Desiderio in his revision of the catalogue of the sculptor from Settignano; he also added other important works that had previously been associated with Donatello, for example, the *Panciatichi Madonna* on the corner of Via Cavour in Florence (cat. 20; Bode 1887, p. 56).

Changing the attribution of the latter relief presented difficulties in giving the Virgin in the Galleria Sabauda to Desiderio: the artist's early period and the origins of his "imitation" of Donatello had to be reconstructed. The Turin marble is closer to prototypes from the circle of Donatello, to which it makes faithful reference. Examples of such models include the *Yerevan Madonna*, the Madonna at Castelvecchio, and, following the suggestion of Giancarlo Gentilini, a composition surviving in the Palazzo dei Vicari in Scarperia and in a copy formerly in the Altman collection that the Turin relief seems to emulate with scrupulous philological fidelity.[1]

We therefore share Cardellini's opinion that the *Turin Madonna* should be dated, if not to the beginning of the 1450s, then at least to the first few years of the decade (Cardellini 1962-1, p. 144). The work already reveals Desiderio's personal inspiration in a more open depiction of emotions, with an empathetic tenderness between the mother and son that transcends the more impassive meditations of Donatello. This quality must have inspired the unanimous accord that greeted Bode's opinion, which over the years has won support from all the most authoritative scholars of Renaissance sculpture, and, more particularly, in the bibliography dedicated to the artist (for a complete list, see Cardellini 1962-1, p. 144). The solitary exception is Giglioli, who considered the relief to have been the work of Rossellino (Giglioli 1915, pp. 149–54).

Some doubts have more recently been raised on the authenticity of the relief, all based on the large number of stuccos or plasters that repeat the composition literally. In the 1971 catalogue of the Galleria Sabauda, for example, Noemi Gabrielli hypothesized that the marble was a 19th-century forgery based on 15th-century originals made from clay or plaster (Gabrielli 1971, p. 261); and in 1982 Deborah Strom argued that it is precisely the large number of derivations that must raise suspicions about the Turin relief, which she was therefore not prepared to accept as authentic (Strom 1982, p. 132).

We are inclined to believe that the principle outlined by Strom could lead to hazardous conclusions. The lovely draftsmanship of the *Turin Madonna* is alone sufficient to guarantee its autograph status, especially if it is compared with the unquestionably modern marble copy in the Ashmolean Museum, which repeats this composition to the letter (Penny 1992, p. 29), or with the pastiches of Giovanni Bastianini, which incorporate details taken from this model (discussed in cat. 18 in this catalogue).

The widespread production of replicas in stucco and gesso (types of plaster) in Desiderio's workshop is documented in Neri di Bicci's *Ricordanze* (for a list of the copies of the *Turin Madonna*, see cat. 17). Neri's pages provide evidence that Desiderio frequently entrusted casts in a material that lends itself to modeling to the workshop of a colleague who could ennoble them through painting and framing in elaborate architectural tabernacles, with extensive use

of gilding (see Gentilini in this catalogue, pp. 36–37). More specifically, Anne Markham Schulz has recognized a reference to a derivation from the *Turin Madonna* in the painter's note concerning "a tabernacle for a chamber, containing a half-length figure of Our Lady in gesso, in low relief, and Our Lord, nude, who embraces Our Lady,"[2] explicitly attributed to Desiderio (Markham Schulz 1991, p. 186).

A curious episode demonstrates the extraordinary success this work enjoyed from its earliest days, and particularly defines it in relation to the series of copies and derivations that mark the success of other widespread examples of the *Virgin and Child* from the second half of the quattrocento. In the lunette of the funerary monument of Abbot Simone Graziani in the cathedral in Borgo Sansepolcro is a marble relief that faithfully reproduces Desiderio's composition, differing only in tiny details and in its more concise formal synthesis, which lengthens the proportions of the two figures and inflates the volumes. This work, inserted in a tomb that can only be dated to the 1520s, seems to be an earlier work that was reused in that structure, perhaps because the relief had been particularly dear to the deceased during his lifetime. It is interesting to note that the marble in Sansepolcro, which Gentilini believes to be a derivation from Desiderio's work datable to the late 15th/early 16th century, itself inspired an autonomous series of derivations (Giannotti 2004, pp. 159–62).

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1. A. Pieraccini, in *Echi e presenze donatelliane in Mugello* 1986, no. 9, pp. 31–32.
2. "Un cholmo da chamera...drenatovi una $\frac{1}{2}$ nostra donna di gesso di pocho rilievo e nostro signore che abbracc[i]a nostra donna ignudo." See also Neri di Bicci 1976, p. 186, doc. 369.

17 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO (after)

Madonna and Child (After the Turin Madonna)

Stucco, 61 x 36 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Sculptures, RF 897

PROVENANCE
Purchased from the art dealer Godefroy Brauer in 1891 for the Musée du Louvre.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Bode 1887, p. 56; Michel 1897, no. 339 (Florentine School, early replica of a marble in the Turin museum); Vitry 1922, no. 601 (Florentine School, 15th century, early replica of a marble in the Turin museum); Planiscig 1942, pp. 14, 41, no. 3 (cited as a replica of the Turin marble dated 1500 [sic]); Jullian 1945, p. 131 (workshop of Desiderio da Settignano); Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 144, 286–88 (does not mention the example in the Louvre); Pope-Hennessy, Lightbown 1964, I, no. 115, p. 141 (after Desiderio da Settignano); Gabrielli 1971, no. 167, p. 261; Maek-Gérard 1981, no. 6, pp. 21–24 (style of Desiderio da Settignano); Strom 1982, p. 132, note 20; Neri Lusanna, Faedo 1986, II, p. 259, no. 194 (replica of the Turin Madonna); Coonin, 1995-3, p. 178.

Fig. 114
Desiderio da Settignano (after)
The Virgin and Child, polychrome stucco
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, inv. D 489

The stucco is a precise replica of the *Madonna and Child* in the Galleria Sabauda in Turin, a work that can be attributed to the early maturity of Desiderio da Settignano (see cat. 16). The plaster relief, today in Paris, not only provides a faithful reproduction of the loving embrace between the mother and son, but also respects the dimensions of the marble in Turin exactly, even to the extent of repeating the integral molded frame. The work can therefore be considered a cast from a mold taken in all probability from the Turin original, in spite

of recent claims that the order of derivations should be reversed, with the marble relief regarded as a 19th-century fake. This hypothesis was based on consideration of the many examples of the same composition in materials that lend themselves to modeling, at least some of which might therefore be considered early copies of a lost original (Strom 1982, p. 132).

On the other hand, it should be emphasized that the *Turin Madonna* is one of the Marian reliefs that already enjoyed great popularity in the Renaissance. A dozen stucco versions derived from it are known, though not all of them are equally faithful to the archetype. In addition to the one in the Louvre, three other examples are all close derivations from Desiderio's marble relief, even to the exact reproduction of the dimensions: one in the Oriola collection in Amsterdam, another at the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Krefeld (inv. 44/1915), and the third at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (inv. 5767-1859).

Twelve other stuccos, while derived from the Turin marble, differ from the original in certain details, for example, the format, the absence of the molded frame, and the definition of the Virgin's dress. One is today in the Musée Bonnat in Bayonne (inv. 326), another in the Staatliche Museen in Berlin (no. 79), one at the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge (Mass.), yet another at the Museo Bardini in Florence (inv. 1194), two at the Liebighaus in Frankfurt (inv. 121, 1437), one at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lyon (inv. D-489; fig. 114), one in the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris (inv. 1761); one in the Acton collection in Florence; another has passed to the Bellini Gallery in Florence; another in the Harris collection; and the last one was put up for sale at the Salander-O'Reilly Galleries in New York in 2001. This second group often has polychromy that is better preserved and of higher quality; for instance, the reliefs in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Lyon, the former Bellini stucco, and the work recently sold in New York all seem to have maintained their original colors. They bear witness to the practice in Desiderio's workshop, documented by Neri di Bicci's *Ricordanze*, of engaging the services of painters to enhance the copies it produced.

Also known are a terracotta version at the Victoria and Albert Museum (inv. A 8/1916), a papier-mâché version at the Musée Jacquemart-André (inv. 2453), and an alabaster version in Badajoz Cathedral that all replicate the same composition. Serious questions, however, can be raised concerning the authenticity of the latter two reliefs. Another replica in the Abbey of Vallombrosa, framed in an 18th-century tabernacle, should also be mentioned, but on this last example it is difficult to express an opinion. The marble purchased by C.D.E. Fortnum in 1864 (today in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) is certainly false. It is also important to note that, in the second half of the 19th century and early 20th century, the work was much reproduced by both the Manifattura di Signa and Manifattura Cantagalli (see *Manifattura di Signa*, n.d., pl. 34, no. 41; Cantagalli, n.d., p. 239).

The stucco in the Louvre was purchased from Godefroy Brauer in 1891. Just a year later the museum in Lyon bought, from the same Brauer, the replica of the *Turin Madonna* that is still in its collections (Durey in *Quattrocento* 1987, pp. 110–11).

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Madonna and Child (The Lyon Madonna), early 1450s

Pietra serena, 37 x 37 cm
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon, inv. D. 612

PROVENANCE
In the shop of the Florentine art dealer Giovanni Frappa in about 1850 (?); Charles Stein Collection, Paris; purchased in Paris by Edouard Aynard from Charles Stein in 1859 for the Musée de Lyon.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Jullian 1945, pp. 30–31 (attributed to Desiderio da Settignano); Cardellini 1962-1, p. 259 (Geri?); Markham 1964, p. 247 (circle of Desiderio); Pope-Hennessy, Lightbown 1964, II, p. 683; Pope-Hennessy 1974 (revised in Pope-Hennessy 1980, pp. 237–41); Gentilini 1988, pp. 34–35; Moskowitz 2004, pp. 174–75.

The stone slab with a depiction of the Madonna and Child is broken unevenly just above Mary's shoulders, cutting off her head and the halo of the drowsy baby Jesus. Paradoxically, the unfortunate fragmentary condition of the relief has in some way been responsible for both its success and misfortune.

The relief presumably came into the shop of Giovanni Frappa, an art dealer in Florence, in the 1850s (Pope-Hennessy 1964, p. 683; Gentilini 1988, pp. 34–35; Moskowitz 2004, pp. 174–75). After its discovery, its fragmentary nature provided scope for experimentation by a sculptural forger like Giovanni Bastianini who, taking his cue from its incomplete but authentic (and therefore "convincing") composition, produced pastiches by providing faces for the Virgin derived from other original works: from the *Madonna* by Desiderio in the Galleria Sabauda (cat. 16) and from a model ascribed to Antonio Rossellino that is known today through numerous stuccos, one in the Victoria and Albert Museum, and through two marble versions of questionable authenticity, one in the State Hermitage Museum and the other formerly in the Heim Gallery in London. The first such montage is known in a wax, also in the Victoria and Albert, and in many versions in plaster and terracotta. The second assemblage can be found in several examples in marble (on these replicas, see Gentilini 1988, p. 35).

In spite of this unusual development, which was eloquently discussed by John Pope-Hennessy in his famous article on forgeries of Renaissance sculptures, the original relief, which is today in Lyon, has always been accepted as an authentic work ascribable to Desiderio's workshop and to an early date. It has nevertheless suffered from an embarrassed critical silence, due precisely to its physical state. The difficulty of expressing an opinion on the work is well exemplified by Cardellini, who was daunted by the relief's poor condition. Cardellini's entry on the work in her 1962 monograph seemed to find firm ground only by excluding its autograph status. This opinion was supported by Anne Markham Schulz (Markham 1964, p. 247) and in the more recent exhibition at the museum in Lyon dedicated to the quattrocento (Durey, in *Quattrocento* 1987, pp. 112–13).

A possible attribution of the work to Geri, certainly suggested by the use of *pietra serena*, was proposed by Cardellini in the midst of her doubts. Although it cannot be confirmed on account of Geri's indefinable personality, still elusive in spite of recent discoveries on the collaborative work of the two brothers, this hypothesis remains a good compromise. It helps to explain the character of the work: clearly Desideriesque, but translated into a muted sentimentality; less lively and more banally narrative in the pose of the Child; and of an early date close to the *Turin Madonna* (cat. 16), which was produced under the strong influence of Donatello. If the Lyon fragment is assigned to the early 1450s, it becomes more difficult to imagine other collaborators working with the young and as yet unestablished Desiderio, outside of the close circle of his brothers and workshop partners.

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19 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

Madonna and Child (The Foulc Madonna), early 1460s

Marble, 59 x 45 cm
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, N. W30-1-2

PROVENANCE

Galleria dell'Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova; purchased by the Foulc collection in 1877; acquired in 1930 with W. P. Wilstach funds for the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bode 1887, p. 56 (Desiderio); Tschudi 1887, p. 34 (Desiderio); Kennedy 1930, p. 257; Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 242–43 (with complete previous bibl.) (Desiderio); Markham 1964, p. 246 (19th-c. fake); Pope-Hennessy 1974, pp. 135, 152 note 2 (Desiderio); Strom 1982, pp. 132–34 (19th-c. fake); Goldner 1989, p. 472 (workshop of Desiderio); Markham Schulz 1991, p. 389 (workshop of Desiderio); Bellandi 1997, p. 35 (Desiderio).

The relief of Mary, which has been in the Philadelphia Museum of Art since 1930, had previously entered the Foulc collection in Paris in 1877. However, it has a more distinguished provenance, that of the Ospedale di Santa Maria Nuova in Florence. In reality, the collections in the Galleria dell'Ospedale, which were formed in the 1860s, had assembled not just works of art owned by the institution but also many that had come from other hospitals and religious institutions in Florence, for example, the monastery of Santa Maria degli Angeli, the convent of the Oblates, the hospitals of San Matteo and of Bonifazio. There is therefore no certain proof that the marble originally belonged to Santa Maria Nuova; but we know that it was a victim of the "dispersions" that resulted from poor management of the collections, as publicly reported by Pietro Franceschini in the *Nuovo Osservatore Fiorentino* on 22 November 1885. Also sold abroad were the "splendid portraits of the Portinari painted by the marvelous brush of Ugo van der Goes, and ... the missal illuminated, above and beyond all praise, by Gherardo da Firenze."[1] There were also rumors of a possible sale to the Belgian state of the Van der Goes triptych formerly in the church of Sant'Egidio (now in the Uffizi; Franceschini 1885, pp. 189–92).

Since the earliest studies recognizing Desiderio's works, the *Foulc Madonna* was included in the artist's catalogue (Bode 1887, p. 56; Tschudi 1887, p. 34). In 1930 Clarence Kennedy linked the work with a possible plaster derivation mentioned in Neri di Bicci's *Ricordanze*, which notes, as consigned to a gold-beater on 19 February 1465, an example of "Our Lady made of plaster by the hand of Desiderio with Our Lord, partly swaddled, in her arms" (Kennedy 1930, p. 257; Neri di Bicci 1976, pp. 239–40).[2]

The work was later the subject of a series of examinations by skeptical critics who called not just its autograph status but also its authenticity into question. Cardellini (1962, p. 242) considered it a secure and eloquent example of the mature style of Desiderio, but Anne Markham Schulz replied to this with the hypothesis that it was a forgery (Markham 1964, p. 246), an opinion seconded by Ursula Schlegel. In 1982 Deborah Strom concurred with these doubts and, in organizing her conclusions, extended her suspicion of forgery to many other marbles ascribed to Desiderio (Strom 1982, pp. 130–35, in particular pp. 132–34). Even Pope-Hennessy, in a text devoted to Antonio Rossellino, hesitated to dismiss the doubts about the *Foulc Madonna*; his own uncertainty was occasioned by the poor state of preservation of the marble surfaces (Pope-Hennessy 1980, pp. 135, 152 note 2).

In fact the relief is truly marvelous, in the use of *stiacciato* that subtly defines the drapery of the Virgin's mantle, the swaddling clothes that wrap the Child, his hair, and the host of angels in the background—all swept up in one laughing burst of emotion, suspended between surprise and gaiety. Even the change of heart by Markham Schulz, who has more recently attributed the relief to Desiderio's workshop after the master's death (Markham Schulz 1991, p. 389), does not seem to recognize its extraordinary quality, which, if anything, can be attributed to the period of the artist's full maturity.

Two stuccos derived from the work are known, corresponding to the Philadelphia marble even in their measurements: one in the Staatliche Museen in Berlin, the other in the Museo Bardini in Florence. Furthermore, George R. Goldner has proposed that a sheet purchased by the Getty Museum, and attributed to Desiderio, is a study for a Madonna and Child connected in many details with the *Foulc Madonna* (Goldner 1989, p. 472).

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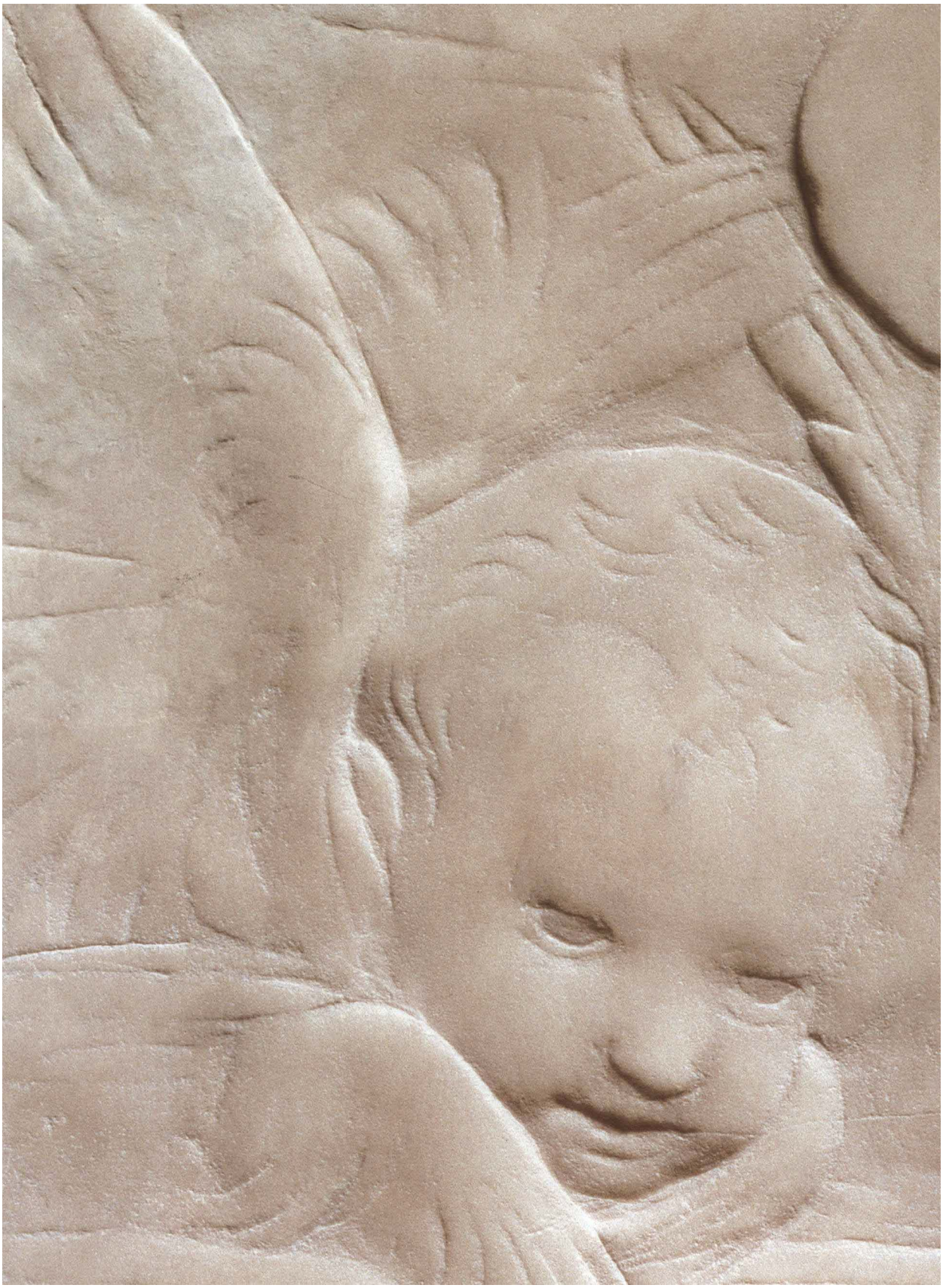
1. "[...] gli stupendi ritratti dei Portinari dipinti dal maraviglioso pennello di Ugo van der Goes, e [...] il messale al di sopra di ogni elogio miniato da Gherardo da Firenze," P. Franceschini, "La Galleria del R. Spedale di Santa Maria Nuova," *Il Nuovo Osservatore Fiorentino*, 22 November 1885, pp. 189–92.

2. "Nostra Donna di gesso di mano di Desidero cho Nostro Signore in chollo ch'è mezzo fasc[i]ato."



Madonna and Child (The Panciatichi Madonna), ca. 1460

Marble, 68 x 53 cm (frame not original)
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, inv. Dep. p. 92 n. 4

PROVENANCE

Recorded in the house of Baccio Valori in 1591; passed to the Panciatichi collections in 1726 (?); placed in the tabernacle on the corner of Palazzo Panciatichi, at the intersection of Via Cavour and Via de' Pucci; on 15 May 1916, moved into the study of the Soprintendente Giovanni Poggi; on 28 April 1920, entered the collections of the Museo Nazionale del Bargello.

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The *Panciatichi Madonna* is one of the most secure entries in the catalogue of works by Desiderio da Settignano. Although it is not documented in early sources, since the proposals put forward by Bode (Bode 1887, p. 56) and Tschudi (Tschudi 1887, p. 34) it has been unanimously agreed that the work is autograph, with the single ill-starred exception of De Liphart (De Liphart 1924, pp. 1–4). Even Deborah Strom, in a study aimed at restricting the group of low reliefs of the Virgin that could be directly assigned to Desiderio to a very few examples (Strom 1982, pp. 132–34), saw no need to question the attribution of this work to the sculptor.

Bode's hypothesis that the work passed through the Medici family (Bode 1892–1905, VI, 1899, pl. 298) has thus far remained unsupported. As recently underlined by Giancarlo Gentilini (Gentilini 2005, pp. 477–78, 490 note 29), however, the relief can be identified with a Madonna "with a tenderly plump baby boy, with a lively glance, delightfully joyful" "by the hand of Desiderio da Settignano."[1] In 1591 this work was in the Palazzo Valori in Borgo degli Albizzi, where it was recorded in the guide to Florence written by Francesco Bocchi published in that year (Bocchi 1677, p. 362). The relief probably passed to the Panciatichi family after 1726, when much of the Valori collection of manuscripts entered the Panciatichi collections by inheritance through the Guicciardini family (Gentilini 2005, p. 490 note 29).

The relief was placed in a tabernacle on the corner of Palazzo Panciatichi, at the intersection of Via Cavour and Via de' Pucci, and remained there until the beginning of the 20th century. On 15 May 1916, Giovanni Poggi had it removed from the tabernacle and brought into his study, on the pretext that it was endangered by the possibility of air raids. In fact, on 24 July 1913, Giacomo De Nicola had already raised questions about its state of preservation, citing a letter to the city commission on fine arts that declared the relief "much damaged by inclement weather, against which it has no protection."[2] On 28 April 1920 the relief was transferred from Poggi's study to the Museo del Bargello, where it was welcomed by De Nicola. The transfer was authorized by the Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione in accordance with the Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni, the new owner of the building on Via Cavour, at the end of a legal battle—the Marchesa Panciatichi Ximenes D'Aragona, usufructuary of her dead husband's patrimony and therefore also of the palazzo, had in June 1916 contested the decision of the Soprintendenza to remove the relief from the tabernacle (see Archivio Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Deposits, file A 92).

The masterful use of *stiacciato* in this work, which is of extraordinary quality, achieves surprising atmospheric effects in the treatment of the folds of fabrics and the fluttering hair of the laughing Child, and thus suggests a later dating, one contemporary with the more advanced details seen in the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo*. We therefore agree with the opinions of Bode (Bode 1887, p. 56), Schottmüller (Schottmüller 1913-2, p. 57; Schottmüller 1933, pp. 44–45), Pope-Hennessy (Pope-Hennessy 1996, p. 118, 375–76), and Negri Arnoldi (Negri Arnoldi 2003, pp. 59–60), preferring a date in the early 1460s to Cardellini's proposal of 1453 (Cardellini 1962, p. 156).

Moreover, the relief stands out as the culmination of Desiderio's assimilation and development of the teachings of Donatello, not just in the highly sensitive treatment of the marble, but also in the complex and vivid poetics of the emotions, as demonstrated in the warm relationship between mother and son, and in the more complex arrangement of the figures. Not content to adapt to the front plane, they occupy the background space, opening it up to limitless depth. It was just this latter aspect that prompted Leonardo da Vinci to reconsider the Madonna and Child theme in his own way, with results evident in the *Madonna of the Carnation* in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich and the *Benois Madonna* in the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg. George R. Goldner has identified a study close to the *Panciatichi Madonna* on a sheet in the Getty

Museum in Malibu (Goldner 1989, pp. 471–72); an even closer composition can be seen in a sketch at the Uffizi (fig. 109), whose attribution by Angelini to Desiderio (exh. cat. Florence 1986-3, pp. 54–55) has been supported by Gentilini (see p. 196) in response to Goldner's reconsideration in favor of Antonio Rossellino (Goldner 1989). A stucco copy of the relief formerly in the Staatliche Museen in Berlin, evidently of early date, was destroyed during World War II.

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Fig. 115
Desiderio da Settignano (after)
The Virgin and Child (replica of *The Panciatichi Madonna*), stucco
Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. 2945 (destroyed)

1. "col puttino di tenere carni, di vista viva e vezzosamente lieto" "di mano di Desiderio da Settignano," Bocchi 1591, p. 362.
2. "molto guasto dale intemperie contro le quali non ha alcuna difesa."

DECORATIVE SCULPTURE AND STONE FURNISHINGS

Giancarlo Gentilini

Documents, sources, and works all attest that in mid-quattrocento Florence the workshop of Desiderio and Geri was—with that of Bernardo and Antonio Rossellino, also from Settignano—the most skilled and prolific producer of architectural ornament and stone furnishings and fittings (Cardellini 1962-1, passim). The shop combined the traditional expertise of stone carvers from Fiesole, for the most part under the direction of Geri, with the innovative influence of Donatello and Bernardo Rossellino, who had for some time been revitalizing the typologies and decorative vocabulary of such works. Desiderio, in turn, had been interpreting these advances to masterful effect, in particular in his refined and precious marbles.

It is possible that Desiderio and Geri gained their first experience under the Rossellino brothers (Markham Schulz

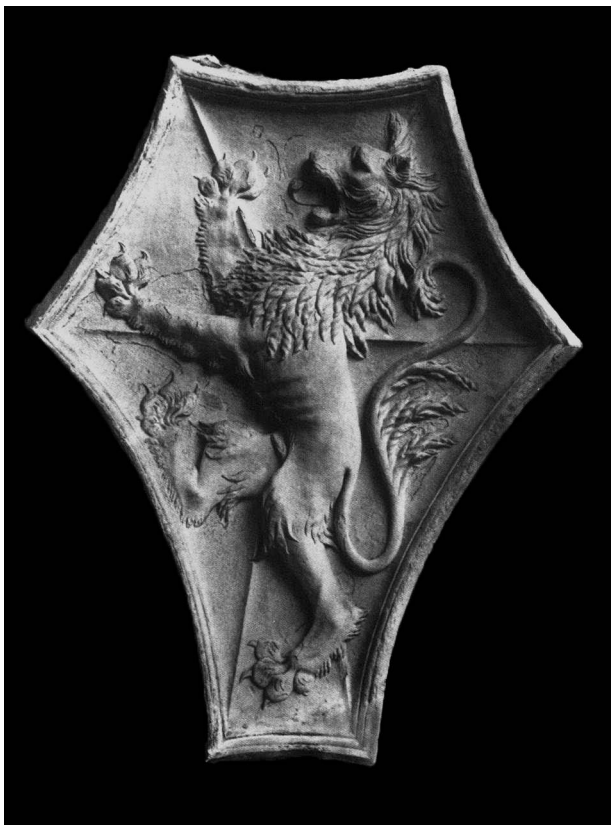
Fig. 116
Bartolomeo, Geri, Francesco, and Desiderio da Settignano?
Portal of the Second Cloister with Spinelli Arms, *pietra serena*, 1452
Santa Croce, Florence

1977): In San Lorenzo, they may have worked on the capitals of the crossing vault and associated friezes with seraphim, payment for some of which was made to Maso and Antonio Rossellino in 1448–49. And at Santa Croce, a majestic stone portal that leads into the second Rossellino cloister, constructed at the expense of Tommaso Spinelli in late 1452, includes motifs that recur in the work of Desiderio and Geri, such as the two profiles *all'antica* and the chubby little flying angels (fig. 116). Moreover, it was here that Desiderio was to execute, in 1460, his most labor-intensive and successful decorative project: the frieze of the portico in the Pazzi Chapel, animated by 58 vivacious cherubim.

The workshop near Santa Trinita, which specialized in fireplaces, lavabos, architectural decoration, coats of arms, and

Fig. 117
Desiderio and Geri da Settignano
Chimneypiece from Palazzo Manfredi, pietra serena, ca. 1453–55
Pinacoteca Comunale, Faenza

Fig. 118
Desiderio da Settignano and assistants (Gregorio di Lorenzo?)
Gianfigliazzi Coat of Arms
pietra serena, 1459
Palazzo Gianfigliazzi, Florence
(facade overlooking Lungarno Corsini)



other furnishings in *pietra serena* or in *macigno* (local varieties of gray sandstone), was successful almost from the start. Its production includes the wall basins and chimneypiece for which Desiderio received payment in 1456 from the art dealer Bartolomeo Serragli (Corti, Hartt 1962)—a commission that brings to mind the lovely chimneypiece in Palazzo Manfredi in Faenza (fig. 117), adorned with angels very similar to those on the Spinelli portal; the windows executed in 1458 for the villa in Settimo belonging to Vittore Ghiberti; and the coat of arms on Palazzo Gianfigliazzi (ca. 1459; fig. 118) that was praised by Desiderio's earliest biographers and by Vasari himself (Franci 1995; Bellandi 1997). Most of these works were produced for the many magnificent palaces under construction in Florence at the time, as the list of wealthy clients in Geri and Desiderio's *Portata al Catasto* of 1458 suggests (Darr, Preyer 1999). They include Luigi Tegliacci, who in 1459 sold his splendid palace on the Lungarno near Santa Trinita (begun in 1457 but not yet completed) to the Gianfigliazzi family; Bartolomeo Lenzi, the owner of an elegant house in Piazza Ognissanti where work continued between 1456 and 1458; and Lodovico Boni, for whose superb residence near Santa Maria Maggiore (1455–58) were carved the very elegant fireplace with portraits and allegorical putti (figs. 12, 52; Victoria and Albert Museum, ca. 1455–57), one of Desiderio and Geri's masterpieces, and the majestic coat of arms held up by a laughing putto (fig. 11; Detroit Institute of Arts, ca. 1458), which Vasari praised as a work by Donatello (Godby 1982; Darr, Preyer 1999). Such commissions must have also occasionally included more modest but no less innovative or exquisite works in stone, such as the Serzelli coat of arms from Palazzo Pretorio in Galeata (now Museo Mambrini), which was probably carved by Desiderio in 1452–53 (Bellandi 1997; cat. 22); the arms of the Capitano del Popolo Carlo Riguardati from Norcia in the Palazzo del Bargello in Florence (1461; Fumi Cambi Gado 1993, pp. 78–79); and the console, originally part of a tabernacle, with the coat of arms of the Altoviti family between seraphim (Museo del Bigallo; Bellandi 1997).

Desiderio's decorative penchant was best expressed in several famous marble furnishings produced for the Medici, for both secular (for the new palazzo in Via Larga) and liturgical (for the San Lorenzo complex) sites. The latter included the lavabo with Medici heraldic devices, altered for installation in the Old Sacristy, which we can assume was carved by the young Desiderio with Antonio Rossellino (ca. 1451/53; Gentilini 1994), and the lost marble base for Donatello's bronze *David* (ca. 1456/59), made by Desiderio according to the sources (Caglioti 2000, passim). These works were elaborate and imaginative, like the base for the Marsuppini tomb (ca. 1455–59; cat.1), featuring harpies and other highly refined animal and plant motifs. Four unusual

bases with basket-weave ornament, garlands, and cherubim at the corners (today in the Bargello) were probably made for a monumental tabernacle intended for the presbytery of San Lorenzo (figs. 7, 9; Gentilini in exh. cat. Florence 1985, pp. 286–97; Morolli in exh. cat. Florence 2006, pp. 323–25, note 128), designed by Donatello and executed by Desiderio and his collaborators, among them Gregorio di Lorenzo (ca. 1455). And a marvelous, unpublished monumental lectern, in the form of an eagle about to take flight (ca. 1462, private collection; fig. 119), seems also to be connected with these ambitious projects for the decoration of San Lorenzo. Desiderio was still working on them in 1462, but they never came to completion.

Other marble liturgical furnishings for which Desiderio is responsible include the famous ciborium in the form of a *tempietto*, made for San Pier Maggiore and in part now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington (ca. 1464–65; completed by Benedetto da Maiano; Gentilini 1994; Caglioti 2003); the high altar in Santa Trinita, with Gianfigliazzi heraldic devices and tiny profile portraits (Franci 1995), perhaps carved with the assistance of Matteo Civitali (ca. 1463); and a delicate stoup in the form of a shield supported by a pouting cherub (ca. 1457/58; private collection; Gentilini 1992).

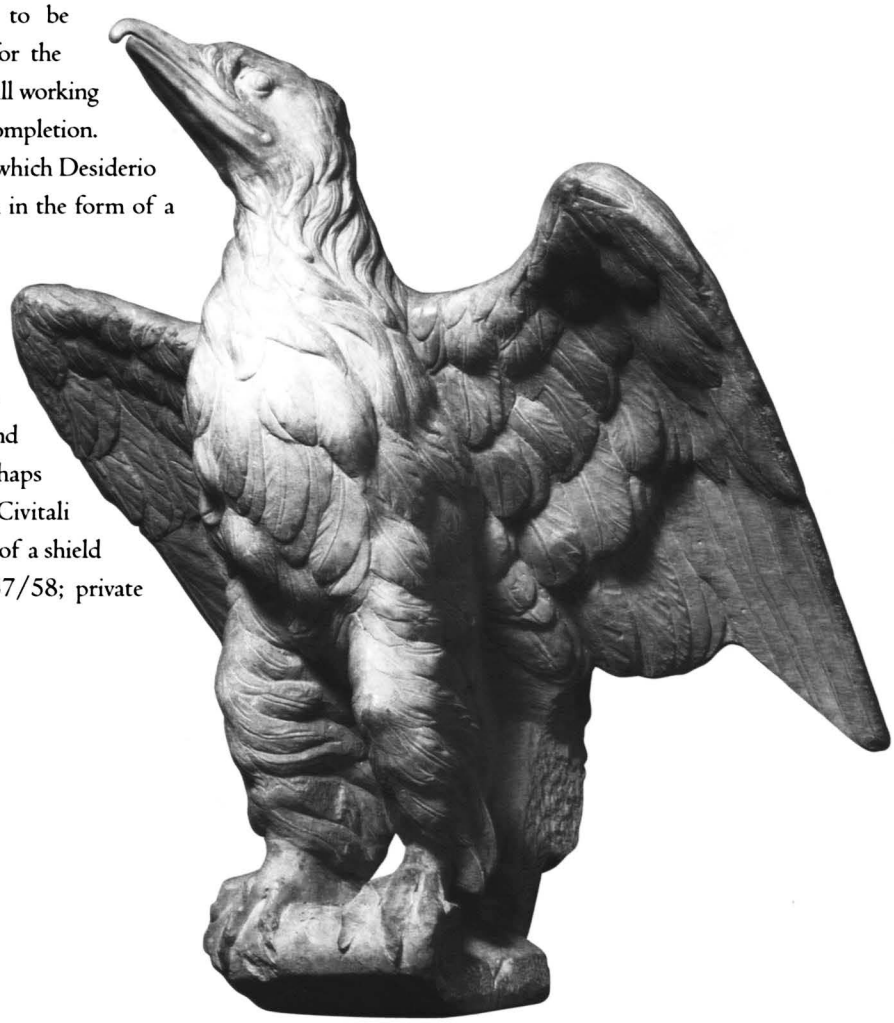


Fig. 119
Desiderio da Settignano (attributed to)
Lectern in the Form of an Eagle, forming part of a pulpit
(from the Basilica of San Lorenzo?)
marble, ca. 1462
private collection

21 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO (attributed to)

Domestic Altarpiece, ca. 1443–45

Tondo: Donatello
Gilded bronze, diam.: 27 cm
Florence, ca. 1443
Frame: Desiderio da Settignano
Marble, traces of gilding
H: 88 cm; L: 51 cm; Depth: 11 cm
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna,
Kunstkammer, inv. 7462

PROVENANCE

The altarpiece entered the Kunsthistorisches Museum with the Este collection in 1923, and probably came from the Obizzi collection in Catajo (province of Padua), which passed to the Austrian house of Este in 1805.

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At first glance this work appears to be a typical small household altarpiece of its period. Closer observation, however, reveals peculiarities that distinguish it from the multitude of Florentine creations for private devotion.

In its essential form the little altarpiece resembles an aedicule, but it is not composed of classical architectural elements such as pilasters and a pediment. The central section of this "pseudo aedicule" is formed, rather, of a vertical rectangular panel, framed by a finely profiled molding. This section is surrounded at the top and sides by a flat frieze decorated with vine-scroll ornament that resembles a door frame, which is "standing" on a sort of cornice, flanked on the right and left by flaming candelabra. The cornice widens into another friezelike section below, a sort of socle zone decorated with a festoon whose ends are transformed into volutes, suggesting an Ionic capital drawn out in width. Above, the central section of the pseudo aedicule is crowned by a broad egg-and-dart frieze and a sharply profiled, strongly projecting entablature, on which rests a footed bowl full of fruit, from which leafy vines grow and once again coil into volutes at the ends.

This remarkable structure essentially serves as an extraordinarily elaborate frame for the gilded bronze tondo set into the lower half of the rectangular central section. In the corners above this tondo are two half-kneeling adolescent angels, with long, filmy garments, holding a scroll and a crown. Old photographs indicate the scroll was once inscribed *Ave Maria*. The tondo itself shows a Madonna of Humility and numbers among the lesser-known works of Donatello, generally dated about 1443.

While there is wide agreement about the author and date of the bronze tondo, the same cannot be said of the marble frame. The only indisputable point is that it must have been made especially for the tondo, for which it creates a distinguished setting, and that the hand that made it, while none too distant from Donatello, is not his own.

As the preceding description indicates, the formal composition of the frame is rather unusual. The technical quality of the

execution, however, is excellent. Observation of the "door-frame" frieze, for instance, shows that this is no schematic decoration, but rather a work in which each delicately undulating leaf is individually and meticulously modeled. There are also subtle variations between the left and right sides, which are not formed in monotonous symmetry, but composed of quite different elements. The two flanking candelabra are boldly undercut and perforated, presenting a tour de force, in which every blow of the chisel must have been a risk. Most remarkable is the infinite delicacy of the two angels, rendered in a *stiacciato* so refined that they seem more drawn than carved.

Hermann was the first to connect this superb work with the school of Desiderio da Settignano and to propose, although with reservations, the name of the little known Francesco di Simone. The attribution was cautiously accepted by Rosenauer, while Pope-Hennessy not only adopted it with conviction, but also added that the frame must have been produced about 1475 as a posthumous homage to Donatello. Joannides, on the other hand, spoke up for an attribution of at least the figural elements of the frame to Desiderio himself, but put this opinion in a footnote, so that up to now it has gone practically unnoticed. His observations are so pertinent that they should be cited in full here: "the feline angels are of such high quality both in the translucency of their detailing (for which a parallel can be found in the fleeing monk in Desiderio's Washington 'St. Jerome') and in their ecstatic asymmetry that, in my view, they can only be by Desiderio himself." To this should be added that, above all, the form of the face of the right-hand angel—with its mouth open in a half-smile, in which no teeth, but two tiny dimples at the corners of the mouth are visible, and with its heavy-lidded, pupil-less eyes—corresponds so closely to Desiderio's characteristic type as to eliminate any doubt about the authorship. The subtle treatment of the drapery also supports this attribution. As to the nonfigurative parts of the frame—which even Joannides connects with Francesco di Simone—they show a delicate modeling and remarkable creativity that in my opinion points to Desiderio himself, all the more since Francesco di Simone's secure works show instead hard modeling and never achieve a comparably refined spirit.

Although the frame's stylistic proximity to Desiderio's secure works is evident, there has been a certain reluctance to ascribe the frame to the master himself, and an attribution to some member of his school has been preferred. Might it be that Desiderio, born in 1429—and given the assumption that very little time passed between the execution of the tondo and the frame—was considered too young for such a work? Such doubts would not only reflect an excessively modern conception of childhood and maturity, but also deny the fact that Desiderio seems to have been a child prodigy in his profession. Moreover, the essentially unorthodox and imperfectly balanced assemblage of elements in the frame might well be indications of a youthful work. The excessively daring openwork carving of the candelabra also points to a still inexperienced but highly promising artist, determined to show what he could do. These considerations make the attribution of the frame—even if only in part—to Francesco di Simone Ferrucci, who was born in 1437, even stranger, since it necessitates a later date for the execution of the frame, as Pope-Hennessy indeed suggested. But if a later date is considered, why should we not think of Desiderio himself rather than of a somewhat boring eclectic? There seems in any case to be no solid reason to reject such a stylistically convincing attribution on the basis of age, and I would therefore propose that the whole frame should be ascribed without reservation to the young but brilliant Desiderio, who would later become famous for his sensitive working of marble and his unsurpassed feeling for decorative detail.

Some doubts, however, may simply have been inspired by the assumption that producing a frame for Donatello's tondo seems too modest a task for a master of Desiderio's stature. But if we accept the hypothesis of a youthful work, one might reply that this assignment must undoubtedly have been an honor and that the already famous Desiderio did not consider it beneath him to make a pedestal for Donatello's bronze *David*.

Thus it does not seem at all astonishing that the young Desiderio should emerge as the creator of an extraordinary "mounting" for a jewel-like small-scale work of Donatello's. The two artists seem moreover to have been in contact quite early, and Pope-Hennessy even went so far as to suggest that Desiderio must have been trained by Donatello, since he had so fully mastered the technique of *stiacciato* that he could only have learned it from the master himself (Pope-Hennessy 1993, 314).

The little Vienna altarpiece has clear connections with Donatello's work not only in the subtly executed flat relief, but also in the creative spirit that permeates it. A comparison of the frames of the tondo with the ornamental framing for the niches for Donatello's stucco reliefs above the bronze doors of the Old Sacristy at San Lorenzo, for instance, reveals that both are characterized by a similar, deliberate disregard for architectural principles. It is significant that Filippo Brunelleschi, the architect of the

Old Sacristy, based his most severe criticism of the stucco works precisely on this aspect.

One further observation may be important in this connection. One cannot help but notice that the uppermost section of the marble frame appears less carefully executed than the rest of the altarpiece. Could this be because it was intended to be colored? The thought is inspired by the upper fruit basket's strong resemblance to the colorful glazed terracotta decoration of the Della Robbia workshop. That entirely novel technique was used for the first time in the early 1440s, specifically on the tabernacle in Peretola executed by Luca della Robbia between 1441 and 1443. Polychrome decoration evidently became fashionable in this period, as Donatello's pigmented and gilded stucco decorations in the Old Sacristy (1433–43) attest, and one can readily imagine various experiments in pursuit of the desired effect. Since Desiderio used color on his Marsuppini tomb monument, it seems not entirely unjustified to suggest that he also considered doing so on the Vienna frame, and thus executed the fruit basket with a lesser degree of finish, since he intended to cover it with paint.

The artistic ideas sketched out here in context, together with the preceding stylistic arguments, lend increasing probability to the hypothesis that the whole frame of the Vienna tondo is a youthful work of Desiderio. In my opinion one can further deduce from this evidence that Desiderio executed the frame, if not under Donatello's direct supervision, then at most only a few years after the latter's departure for Padua—a departure that by no means represented a complete abandonment of Florence—and that a dating of about 1443–45 appears thoroughly plausible.

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22 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

Serzelli Coat of Arms, ca. 1452–53

Stone, 45 x 35 x 8.5 cm
Museo Civico "Mons. Domenico Mambrini," Galeata

PROVENANCE
Originally on the facade of the Palazzo Pretorio, Galeata (?); after 1945 it was added to the collection of Monsignor Domenico Mambrini at the time of its exhibition in Palazzo Pretorio.

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Bellandi 1997, pp. 33–37 (Desiderio); Darr, Preyer 1999, p. 730, note 90 (Geri); Gentilini 2002, p. 169, note 117 (Desiderio).

This relief in *pietra serena* was published for the first time by Alfredo Bellandi in 1997, having been identified in the collections of the Museo Mambrini in Galeata, a small town in the province of Forlì, in the Romagna region that has always been subject to Florentine influence. From that moment, the work—which depicts two angels supporting a laurel wreath that surrounds a heraldic shield—has been securely placed in the catalogue of works produced by Desiderio (Darr, Preyer 1999, p. 730; Gentilini 2002, p. 169, note 117). It represents an addition to the sculptor's well-known production of coats of arms, which includes the *Coat of Arms of the Boni Family* (Detroit Institute of Arts). Vasari praised Desiderio not only for his extraordinary skills in working marble, but also for "other works in stone" in the city, in particular "a large coat of arms with a lion, very beautiful" to be seen "on the facade of the house of the Gianfigliazzi" (see Vasari-Milanesi, II, p. 108); even before Vasari, Antonio Billi also referred to this work (Benedettucci 1991, p. 55).

The patrician shield in the relief has been identified as that of the Serzelli family from Tuscany, closely linked to the Romagna region since the first half of the quattrocento when they were appointed to important administrative posts in those territories. According to the tradition recounted in local guidebooks, which cite a provenance from the facade of the Palazzo Pretorio in Galeata, Bellandi suggested the relief had been commissioned by Alberto di Bernardo Serzelli. Alberto had been elected Capitano di Romagna (and was therefore from that moment resident in Castrocaro) on 28 February 1451 (Florentine style; 1452 modern style) to replace his brother Bonaventura, who had been appointed to the post on 19 February of the same year. Since the office of podesta of Galeata, a town subject to Florence, was held by an employee of the lord of Castrocaro, it is not improbable that Serzelli also had his own coat of arms displayed there to commemorate his mandate. Further research, kindly made available by Bellandi, clarified that Serzelli was confirmed in that office in July 1452, in all probability for the following six-month period. The coat of arms might therefore be dated as late as the end of 1452, particularly since works of this type, linked to elected administrative posts, were often only ordered at the end of the term of office.

This chronology appears, moreover, to be confirmed by an examination of the style of the work, which seems at least from a formal standpoint to have already moved beyond experiments dependent on the style of Donatello, as for example in the *Turin Madonna* (cat. 16). If anything, the Galeata relief is close to other experiments in which, based on the study of *stiacciato*, Desiderio had developed a more energetic and subtly varied working of the surfaces, though still far removed from the more intense atmospheric effects achieved in such mature works as the *Panciatichi Madonna* (cat. 20). One thinks of the *Young Girl* in the Bargello (cat. 6), which since Cardellini has been considered a marvelous example of this "middle style." It is also true that with the Serzelli coat of arms Desiderio seems to have made a daring and inventive leap forward, freeing himself from a flatter *variatio* of assimilated models. Thus, compared with other examples of putti supporting arms, such as those on the base of Donatello's *Gattamelata Monument* in Padua or on the arms of the Uzzano at the Sapienza, the angels in Desiderio's relief are animated by a whimsical exuberance and placed in a harmonious and symmetrical arrangement that is also lively and dynamic.

As noted by Alan Darr and Brenda Preyer, who are inclined to ascribe the work to Geri, the integral molding of the relief is identical to that in the *Young Saint John* in *pietra serena* today in the Bargello (cat. 13), and in the *Young Woman* in Detroit (fig. 16; Darr, Preyer 1999, p. 730). However, the *Turin Madonna* (cat. 16) also has a similar molding, which thus evidently was a common solution in the works produced by Desiderio and his workshop.

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23 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO

Tabernacle of San Lorenzo, completed in 1461

Marble
Tabernacle (from the base of the ciborium to the top of the lunette): 242 x 87 cm
Ciborium: 147 x 87 x 20 cm
Candle-bearing angel on the left: 92 cm (base: 18 x 13 cm)
Candle-bearing angel on the right: 91 cm (base: 17 x 13 cm)
Blessing putto: 55.5 cm
Pietà: 68.5 x 91 x 7.5 cm
Relief on the left of the pedestal: 22.4 x 95.7 cm
Relief on the right of the pedestal: 22.4 x 95.7 cm
Basilica of San Lorenzo, Florence

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Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 217–35 (with bibl.); Parronchi 1965, pp. 130–50; Verdier 1983, pp. 303–11; Beck 1984, pp. 213–17; Gaborit 1987, pp. 97–103; Markham Schulz 1991, p. 388; Markham Schulz 1992, pp. 182–88; Scalini 1994–1995, pp. 29–41; Caglioti 1996, note 109, pp. 152–54; Butterfield, Elam, Coonin 1999, pp. 333–57.

Today the tabernacle is in the right aisle of the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence. The current arrangement was effected after World War II when each distinct element—the Pietà relief of Christ, two pilasters decorated with torch holders, the ciborium, the two candle-bearing angels, and the lunette with the figure of the Christ Child blessing—was moved from the Neroni Chapel at the far end of the right transept of the basilica. This transfer was the last episode in a complex history that has recently been reconstructed by Andrew Butterfield and Caroline Elam (Butterfield, Elam, Coonin 1999), taking their cue from a document published in 1984 by James Beck (Beck 1984, pp. 213–17).

The tabernacle was first located in the chapel of Saints Cosmas and Damian, the double space at the end of the left arm of the transept in the basilica, where it was installed under the patronage of the Medici. However much some experts have argued that the tabernacle was originally planned for installation in the Old Sacristy, the imposing work was, according to documents brought to public attention by Moreni, "entirely embedded in the wall"[1] on 1 August 1461 (Moreni 1816, I, p. 15) in a space that must have been the one named after the two saints: it was here that an inventory of the basilica's assets recorded the tabernacle in 1507. For reasons linked with the special devotion the work has always inspired, in 1677 it was transferred to the large Neroni Chapel at the other end of the transept. During this relocation to the new "marble chapel,"[2] the tabernacle's original structure was altered, as demonstrated in photographs by Alinari and Brogi (Planiscig 1942, figs. 63–76; Cardellini 1962-1, fig. 248). In this arrangement, the two candle-bearing angels were inverted in relation to their current positions in the wall of the right aisle (fig. 120). Nor do the two vertical panels currently inserted in the base of the tabernacle appear. In the absence of certain evidence, it is difficult to know which of the two solutions was more faithful to the original layout, though it should be emphasized that in certain examples by Luca della Robbia (directly derived from the tabernacle in San Lorenzo, especially the one in the church of San Cristoforo in Barga) the angels holding smaller candles face outward (Gentilini 1983, pp. 224–26). Also, as pointed out by Jean-René Gaborit, the Christ Child, as we see it today, seems to have been inserted into the frame of the lunette. This would have been achieved by rough cutting of the parts of the acroterion that did not fit with it: a close-up photograph published in 1942 by Leo Planiscig that shows it still untouched suggests that this intervention occurred during the last reassembly of the work (Planiscig 1942, fig. 76).

Convinced that the tabernacle had stood on an altar, Alessandro Parronchi advanced the hypothesis that the structure was originally freestanding, that is, it did not rest against a wall (Parronchi 1965). However, the inventory of 1507 records the tabernacle as being located in the Medici Chapel "in place of the altar,"[3] and certain technical observations made by Beck, Gaborit, and Butterfield and Elam seem to have established definitively that the tabernacle must have been built against the wall and fitted with an altar for liturgical celebrations, for which the Pietà may have been used as a frontal. Careful analysis of the splays of the pilasters in the shrine and of the candelabra at the sides of the low relief depicting Christ, the Virgin, and Saint John suggests that the structure must originally have been less embedded than the present one: indeed, the palmette and volute decorative motifs along the lateral faces are still visible (the volutes are similar to those on the base of the Marsuppini monument), though rather coarsely curtailed by the way the tabernacle is embedded in the wall. The earliest sources refer the tabernacle to Desiderio: Albertini's *Memoriale*, the *Libro di Antonio Billi*, and Vasari, who records that the artist carried it "to complete perfection with much diligence" (on the sources, see Cardellini 1962-1, pp. 217–18). However, no documentation has yet been discovered—other than the one mentioned in the *Libro dei Sacrestani*—that would be of value not only for corroborating an attribution (which has in any case never been doubted), but for better understanding the genesis and dating of this complex monument (for discussion of the authorship of the individual elements,

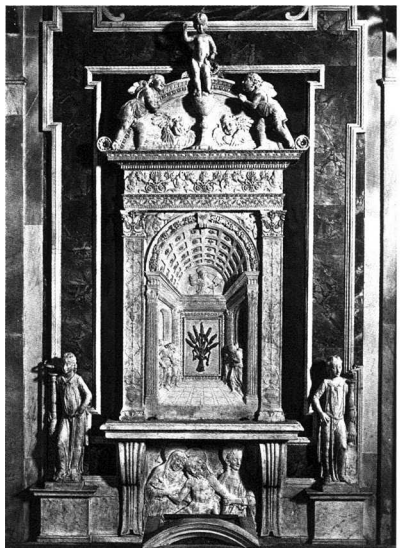

Fig. 120
Desiderio da Settignano
Tabernacle of San Lorenzo
photograph showing
the 17th-century installation

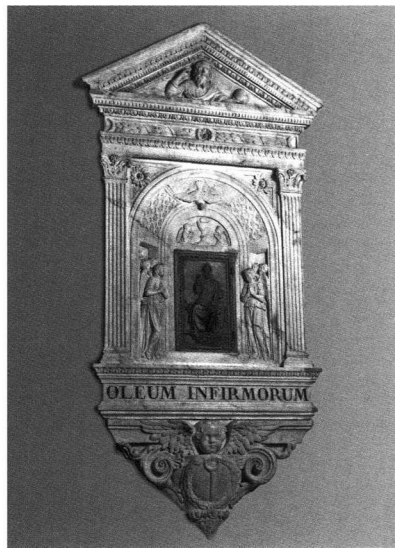

Fig. 121
Bernardo Rossellino
Tabernacle
marble
Sant'Egidio, Florence

see Gentilini in this catalogue). Though no part of the monument can have been executed later than 1461, the order in which the separate parts were made is less clear, especially since we do not have even an approximate reference for the start of the work. In partial agreement with Margrit Lisner (Lisner 1958, pp. 51–53, 66), one might suppose that Desiderio began the tabernacle for San Lorenzo when he was at work on the tomb of the humanist Carlo Marsuppini in the second half of the 1450s, perhaps around 1457, at the time of Donatello's departure from Florence. Donatello was undoubtedly responsible for recommending the young sculptor to the Medici and arguing that Desiderio should receive the commission for the tabernacle, after having suggested him for the coeval execution of the base of the bronze *David*. Therefore the tabernacle would have been executed during the period in which Donatello was more directly involved in the decoration of the basilica (though including the interval he spent in Siena)—in other words, between 1457, the year of execution of the choir in San Lorenzo (unequivocally inspired by the decorative language of the master) and the design of the bronze pulpits, which occupied the artist in the final part of his life. On the other hand, in answer to Francesco Sforza through the Milanese ambassador in Florence, Nicodemo Tranchedini, Desiderio in 1462 claimed "I have been busy, and will be so, for some time on certain works"[4] in San Lorenzo (Spencer 1968, p. 133 doc. 2): this courteous reply by the sculptor gives the sense that he was working as part of a larger and more complex project.

As is rightly recognized by Giancarlo Gentilini in this catalogue, Desiderio's structure was to complete a preexisting piece of architecture, that of the chapel of the Sacrament referred to by Vasari. This required the use of materials other than the marble used for the tabernacle, perhaps of the type used by Michelozzo in the Santissima Annunziata, or by Luca della Robbia in Santa Maria all' Impruneta: it certainly displays highly innovative characteristics compared with the early 15th-century tradition in Florence of walled shrines to hold the Eucharist, though there were some very distinguished examples, for instance, the tabernacle executed by Donatello for Saint Peter's during his stay in Rome (1430–33), and Bernardo Rossellino's tabernacle for the church of Sant'Egidio in 1450 (fig. 121). First, Desiderio chose to abandon the crowning tympanum, which had been included in the two works just mentioned and which was also seen in Luca della Robbia's equally famous tabernacle today in Peretola and formerly in Santa Maria Nuova (1441–43). And, taking his cue from Rossellino's design, Desiderio also transformed the scene at the center of the aedicule into a corridor widened by skillful use of *stiacciato* and perspective, thus creating a more open space to allow for the bustling arrival of angels to adore the body of the Lord.

Adopting a solution similar to the one he had chosen for the Marsuppini monument (cat. 1), Desiderio then imagined his tabernacle as an architectural structure in close dialogue with the surrounding space through the addition of two candle-bearing figures: in their completion of the iconography of the work, through holding two paschal candles on either side of the Sacrament, and in their format in the round, they enhance the monumental impression created by the structure, in keeping with the wishes of his Medici clients.

During the later quattrocento and early cinquecento, the marble tabernacle in San Lorenzo provided an authoritative and famous model for this form of architecture: in addition to the many derivations it inspired in works by Luca della Robbia and Benedetto Buglione (Butterfield, Elam, Coonin 1999, p. 349), we may also mention some of the more literal citations in the œuvre of Francesco di Simone Ferrucci: the tabernacle in the church of Santi Ippolito and Cassiano at La Ginestra, and in Santa Maria at Monteluce di Perugia (Gaborit 1987, p. 98; on the types of Eucharist tabernacles see also Caspary 1963, pp. 39–47; Caspary 1964, pp. 26–35).

Various and intricate vicissitudes, separate from those that the tabernacle as a whole endured, were suffered by the Christ Child, which was placed above a chalice at the top of the lunette. For a summary of these events, see Bormand in the following section of this catalogue.

TM

1. "...fu murato interamente," Moreni 1816, I, p. 15.
2. "...cappella de' marmi."
3. "...in luogo della tavola."
4. "...essere stato obligato et essere ancora per un buon pezzo ad certi lavori."

THE *BAMBINO* OF SAN LORENZO

Marc Bormand

The image of the infant Christ blessing was familiar in 15th-century Florence in the reliefs of the Virgin and Child by Ghiberti, Donatello, or artists of the following generation; as a single figure, the subject has also enjoyed a long history in central Italy—several examples survive from the first half of the 14th century in marble, wood, and stucco[1] (fig. 122). More recently, in Tuscany, Domenico di Niccolo "dei Cori" and Francesco di Valdambrino of the Sienese school produced numerous nude examples in polychrome wood.[2] This iconography was thus well known in Tuscany during the period that interests us. Desiderio developed it in creating an elegant figure, the rounded forms of which perfectly render the subtle qualities of a child's body. The particular iconography of the Christ Child bearing the instruments of his Passion is doubtless drawn from a mystical text, such as the *Visions* of Saint Bridget of Sweden in which the Child appears on a chalice.[3]

The history of the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo* (cat. 23) is a complicated and sometimes obscure one, and that of the *Bambino* surmounting it (fig. 124) and its various vicissitudes is no less complex.[4] At the end of the 15th century, Desiderio's *Bambino* was removed, placed in the sacristy, and only displayed on the main altar of the basilica for Christmas. Another infant Christ by Baccio da Montelupo took its place above the tabernacle. Several copies in marble were considered at various times to have been this version (fig. 125). This information comes to us very early in the memorial published in 1510 by Francesco Albertini,[5] sacristan of San Lorenzo from 1494 to 1499, who dedicated his work, the first guide to Florence, to his friend, the sculptor Baccio da Montelupo. This story was used by Giorgio Vasari in his life of Desiderio: "In San Lorenzo, he finished the marble chapel of the Sacrament, completing it with great diligence. It contained a marble child in the round, which was taken away, and is placed today on the altar at Christmastime as being a marvelous thing. To replace it, Baccio da Montelupo made another, also of marble, which stands upon the tabernacle of the Sacrament."[6] The

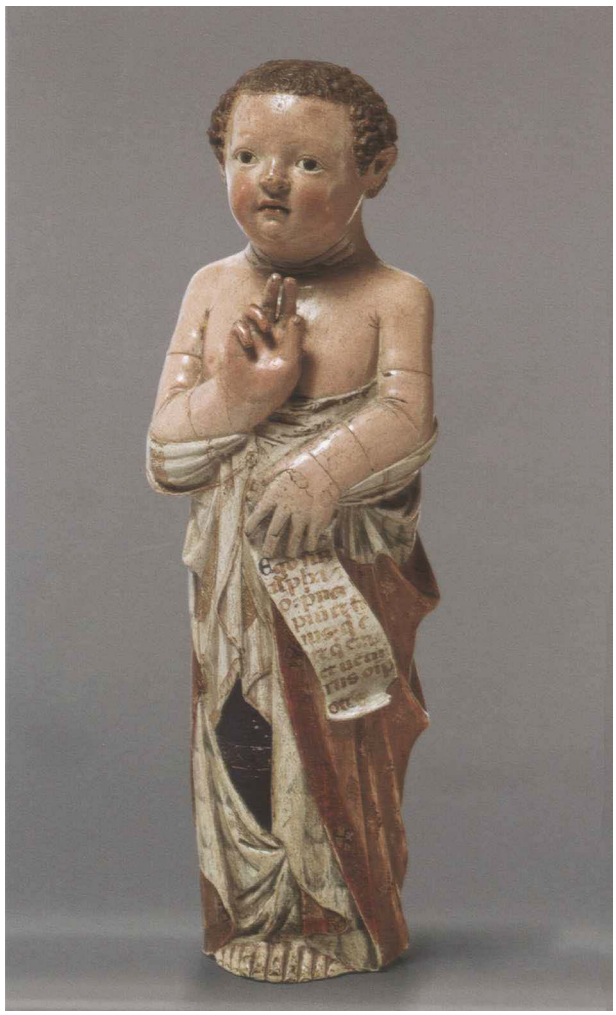

Fig. 122
Umbria-Siena, first half of the 14th century
Christ Child Blessing
polychrome wood, ca. 1325–30
Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence,
Gift of the Carlo di Carlo Heirs, 2001,
inv. Sculture lignee 26

Fig. 123
Giovanni della Robbia (workshop of)
Eucharistic Tabernacle, front
with the *Christ Child Blessing*
enameled terracotta
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Sauvageot gift, 1856,
inv. OA 1300

Fig. 124
Bambino at the top of the San Lorenzo tabernacle

Fig. 125
Florence, ca. 1500
Christ Child
marble
Cleveland Museum of Art,
John L. Severance bequest, inv. 1942.779

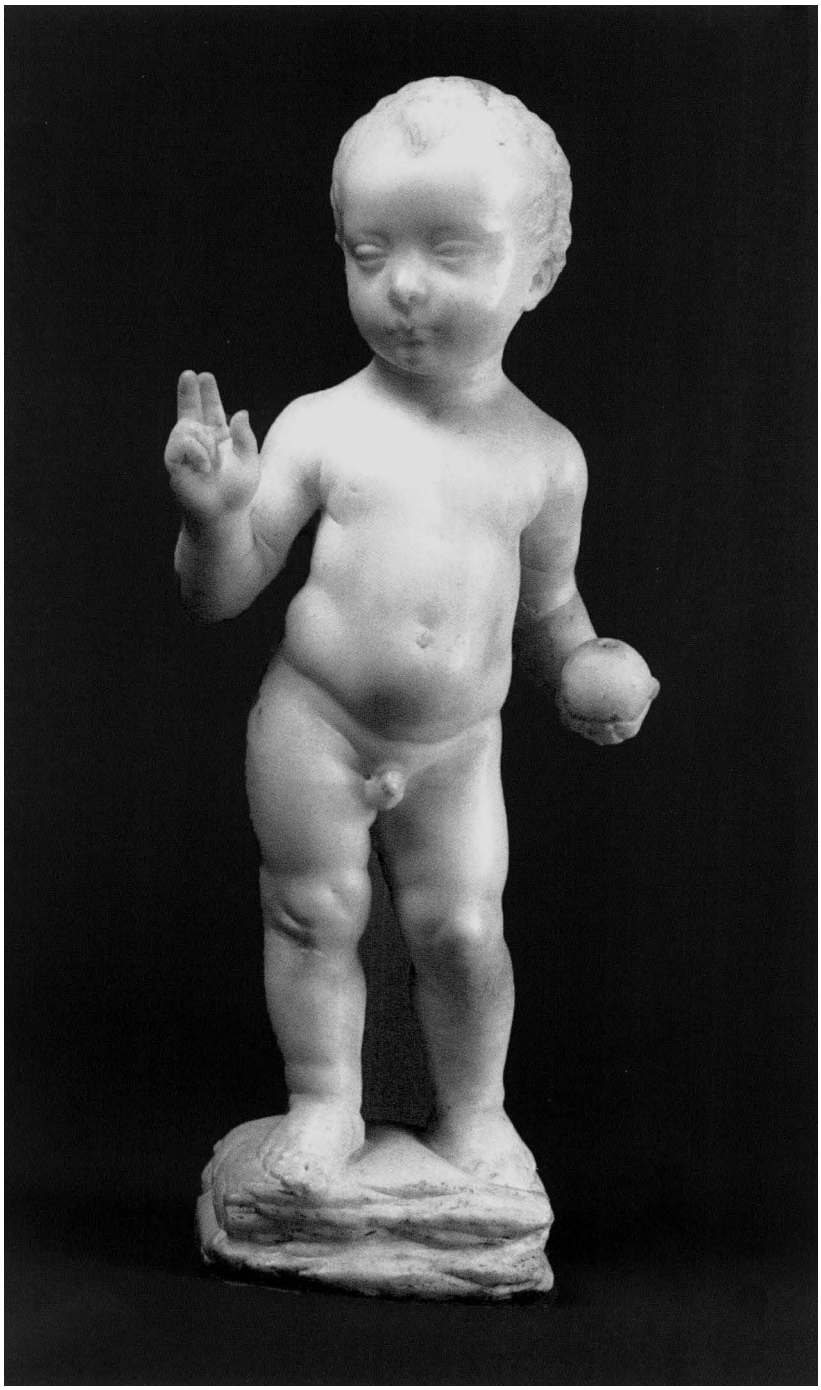

Fig. 126
Desiderio da Settignano (after)
Christ Child Blessing
stucco
Staatliche Museen, Berlin, inv. 1726
(condition of the work before 1945)

reasons for the move have been the subject of several hypotheses. In 1955, Walter and Elisabeth Paatz[7] suggested that the tabernacle had originally been designed for the Sacrament and that it was later changed to conserve the sacred oils and deprived of the image glorifying its eucharistic role. However, Jean-René Gaborit (1987, pp. 97–98) convincingly showed that this change in function did not require any such modification. In 1955, Otto Kurz presented a second theory: in 1497, a particularly troubled period in the life of the city, our *Bambino* found itself linked to the figure of Savonarola. The famous "bonfire of the vanities," which included the destruction of a number of busts, including perhaps some by Desiderio, took place on 7 February. Before this, Savonarola celebrated a mass and the children of Florence marched in procession. Four of these children, dressed as angels, carried a portable altar on their shoulders with "a very fine child in the form of the infant Jesus, white and rosy and splendid as dazzling snow on a gold base. His right hand was raised in blessing, while the left held the crown of thorns, nails of the Passion and the Cross, He showed the people his pierced feet, as well as His hands and side. Of an astonishing beauty, it had been made by the great master, Donatello." This description corresponds almost perfectly with the present *Bambino*. One would be justified, however, in wondering about the work carried in procession: was it the marble one, chosen for its celebrity, or one in a lighter material, of which several versions are known (cat. 26 and fig. 126)? [8] Whatever the answer, the *Bambino* was removed from the tabernacle during or shortly before the important program of works conducted in San Lorenzo from 1499. Placed in the sacristy, it appeared in the inventories of 1507 ("a splendid marble *Bambino*"), and 1526.[9] Another document informs us that a terracotta base was bought from Benedetto Buglioni in 1503, doubtless to display the statuette in the Old Sacristy.[10] Buglioni's workshop, like that of the Della Robbia, had already produced numerous tabernacles inspired by the San Lorenzo example (fig. 123).

We also know that Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici (the future Pope Leo X) was particularly devoted to the San Lorenzo tabernacle, and had expressed a marked devotion for the statuette. A document of 1546[11] written by the secretary of Duke Cosimo de' Medici, Pier Francesco Riccio, tells us that a cleric of San Lorenzo had broken the *Bambino* into six or eight pieces. The statue was sent to Niccolò Tribolo, architect and sculptor in charge of the work at San Lorenzo, for repairs. The statuette currently placed on the tabernacle betrays numerous indications of having been broken. Desiderio's infant was doubtless put back in place in 1677 under Prior Frescobaldi, when the tabernacle was transferred to the chapel in the north transept of the basilica.

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1. Previtali 1982, pp. 213–14.
2. See, for example, sculpture no. 33 by Alessandro Bagnoli in exh. cat. Siena, 1987, pp. 138–39.
3. Gaborit 1987, pp. 98–99.
4. On the *Bambino* of San Lorenzo, see Kurz 1955, Verdier 1983, Gaborit 1987, Markham Schulz 1992, Caglioti 1996, and Butterfield, Elam, Coonin 1999.
5. Albertini 1510, p. 11.
6. *The Life of Desiderio*, Vasari-Milanesi, I, 1878, III; p. 108: "ed in San Lorenzo, fini di marmo la capela del Sacramento, la quale egli con molta diligenza condusse a perfezione. Eravi un fanciullo di marmo tondo, il quale fu levato, e oggi si mette in sull'altare per le feste della Natività di Cristo, per cosa mirabile; in cambio del quale ne fece un altro Baccio da Montelupo, di marmo pure, che sta continuamente sopra il tabernacolo del Sacramento."
7. Paatz 1955, II, pp. 560–61.
8. On this question, see in particular Gaborit 1987 and Butterfield, Elam, Coonin 1999, p. 341.
9. Archivio Capitolare di San Lorenzo, 2634, fol. 3 recto and 45 recto.
10. Butterfield, Elam, Coonin 1999, p. 342 and document VI in appendix, p. 355.
11. Butterfield, Elam, Coonin 1999, pp. 345–49, and document IX in the appendix, p. 356.

24 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO (after)

Christ Child Blessing, ca. 1500

Marble
H: 60.4 cm; W: 26.7 cm; Depth: 15.1 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Sculptures, inv. RF 1218

Restored in 2006 by Delphine Masson

PROVENANCE
Perhaps the copy made ca. 1500 by Baccio da Montelupo to replace Desiderio's original on the tabernacle of the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence. Acquired by antiques dealer Emilio Costantini in Florence in 1899.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Guiffrey 1899, p. 266 (Desiderio da Settignano, original for the altar of San Lorenzo in Florence); Michel 1903, p. 376 ("brother to the one in San Lorenzo, Florence"); Michel 1907, no. 953 (anonymous Italian, late 15th century or early 16th century); Vitry 1922, no. 702 (attributed to Desiderio da Settignano); Planiscig 1942, p. 35 (replica of the *Christ Child Blessing* of San Lorenzo, 16th century); Cardellini 1962-1, no. 384, p. 292 (17th-century interpretation); Verdier 1983, pp. 305–6, p. 310 (one of the series of copies made in memory of Savonarola); Gaborit 1987, pp. 100–2 (15th-century, Baccio da Montelupo?); Markham Schulz 1992, pp. 182–85; Butterfield, Elam, Coonin 1999, pp. 333–37, p. 349, p. 353 (the Louvre work cited in a list of copies).

The replacement of Desiderio's infant Christ on the tabernacle of San Lorenzo by a version made by Baccio da Montelupo has given rise to numerous hypotheses as to what has happened to this latter version. Of the marbles, we can leave aside the Prato version, attributed to Francesco di Simone Ferrucci (cat. 25); the version from the Cleveland Museum of Art (fig. 125), which seems indeed to be an anonymous Florentine work of the late 15th century, despite the attribution to Desiderio proposed by Alessandro Parronchi in 1965; and the current version on the tabernacle, as it is without any doubt the original by Desiderio (although Parronchi has given it to Baccio da Montelupo). At the time of its purchase by the Louvre from the Florentine antiques dealer Emilio Costantini, the Italian presented his version as Desiderio's original from San Lorenzo, and its purchase caused an outcry, particularly from Bernard Berenson.

The statuette, sculpted in a marble that has taken on an amber tint, especially on the face, resulting from the rise of metal oxides to the surface, is "a faithful but at the same time freely interpreted copy of Desiderio's work" (Gaborit 1987, p. 101). The fragility of Desiderio's *Child* gives way to a more lively character, with a more rounded face. The handling of the marble shows the influence of the generation working in Florence in the last quarter of the century. The comparison with the *Bambino* from the tabernacle of the Sacrament in Segromigno Monte (province of Lucca), attributed in documents to Baccio da Montelupo but actually produced in 1518, shows the work of a sculptor who has abandoned the model set by Desiderio and adopted an anatomy that Anne Markham Schulz (Markham Schulz 1992, pp. 183–84) has described as "defined with vigor via an emphatic modulation of the surface," while the facial features are squashed and thickly modeled. The comparison with the Christ in the *Virgin and Child* in the Vincigliata chapel might, with its softened handling of the flesh, provide a better point of comparison (Gaborit 1987, p. 101).

MB

25 FRANCESCO DI SIMONE FERRUCCI (attributed to)

Christ Child Blessing, ca. 1486

Marble
H: 60 cm; W: 26.5 cm
Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Prato

PROVENANCE
Perhaps from the tabernacle "del corpo del Cristo" for the main altarpiece in the Duomo of Prato, commissioned from Francesco di Simone Ferrucci in 1486; the tabernacle was removed from the chapel of the Sacrament in 1633.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Cornelius von Fabriczy, manuscript note on a photograph by Brogi no. 12 730 in the photographic archive of the Kunsthistorisches Institutes in Florence (Baccio da Montelupo); Marchini 1957, p. 67 (Francesco di Simone Ferrucci); Marchini 1963, pp. 24, 81; Cardellini 1962-1, p. 289 (free copy after Desiderio, perhaps late 16th century); Gaborit 1987, pp. 100–101 and note 43, p. 103 (Florence, late 15th century); exh. cat. Fiesole 1994, no. 8, pp. 52–53, note by Maria Grazia Ciardi Dupré Dal Poggetto (Francesco di Simone Ferrucci); Schrader 1994, p. 66 note 22 and p. 122.

In the second half of the 15th century, the *Tabernacle of San Lorenzo* was copied on numerous occasions. As early as 1467, a contract reveals that Mino da Fiesole was commissioned to execute a tabernacle for the baptistery of Volterra "with a little Christ above the Chalice" (*sopra il Calice, un Cristo piccino*; see Zuraw, 1993, pp. 404–44 for the group of tabernacles and no. 63, pp. 1040–53 for the Volterra tabernacle in particular). This motif was used in several other tabernacles: Florence, Sant'Ambrogio, in which the Christ Child is shown from the knees up; Perugia, church of Santa Maria di Monteluce, dated 1483; and Perugia, church of San Pietro.

A series of drawings originating from a now disbound sketchbook attributed to Francesco di Simone Ferrucci include some studies of the *Christ Child Blessing* (for example, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, inv. 446 recto, inv. 447 recto, inv. 451 recto, inv. 2243 recto; see also Dalli Regoli 2003). These drawings, datable to 1485–90, stress Francesco di Simone's interest in this theme, an interest confirmed by another group of drawings showing studies of details for eucharistic tabernacles, preserved at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (fig. 127) and at the Uffizi in Florence (inv. ORN 614; see Ames-Lewis 1985), which present tabernacles dominated by the infant Christ. The relationship may suggest that the studies of the infants in the Louvre drawings were also for tabernacles.

While the Prato marble presents the general pose of the infant Christ in San Lorenzo, it nevertheless reveals some significant differences. The impression conveyed is noticeably different: the graceful character shown by Desiderio is contrasted here by a certain heaviness, especially evident in the thickness of the folds of flesh on the belly and groin, and in the size of the thighs. The *Bambino* here may be usefully compared with two putti standing 58 centimeters high placed on a pair of marble consoles forming part of a 19th-century funerary monument in Cesena (province of Forlì), which probably originally came from the monastery church of Santa Caterina (see Gori 1989, pp. 25–27). The two works present the same type of swollen, rounded belly and dimpled thighs, although this aspect is even more heightened in the Cesena putti. The opulent, fleshy features of the infant Christ recur in a number of the drawn studies previously mentioned. An attribution to Francesco di Simone Ferrucci, however, is rejected by Jean-René Gaborit (1987, p. 103 note 43), who considers this version to be too mediocre for such a skilled sculptor. On the other hand, the work does seem to correspond to the canons that he generally favored.

MB

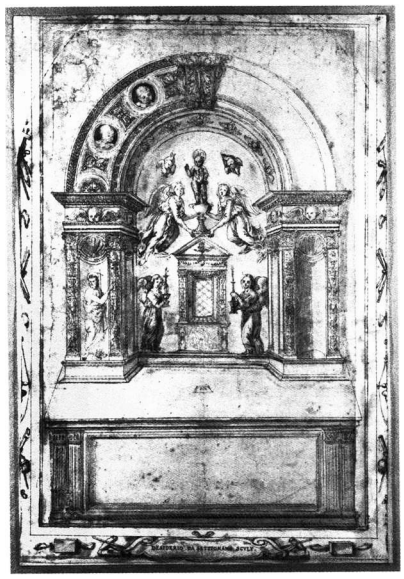

Fig. 127
Francesco di Simone Ferrucci (attributed to)
Project for an Altar
black chalk, crayon, ink, and wash, white heightening on partially pink-tinted paper
Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inv. 4903

26 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO (after)

Christ Child Blessing, second half of the 15th century

Terracotta (?) polychromed
H: 58 cm; W: 28 cm; Depth: 13 cm
Museo Bardini, Florence, inv. 706

Restored in 2006 by Nicoletta Marcolongo

PROVENANCE
Bequeathed with the rest of his collections by antiques dealer Stefano Bardini to the city of Florence, 1922.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
Cardellini 1962-1, p. 292 (after Desiderio, fine workmanship in the stucco); Klapisch-Zuber 1982, pp. 295–97; Neri Lusana, Faedo 1986, no. 196, pp. 259–60 (after Desiderio); Gaborit 1987, note 39 p. 103 (after Desiderio); Darr, Barnet, Boström 2002, no. 56, p. 110, note by Alan Phipps Darr.

This version still retains some old polychromy, which is applied somewhat thickly, and may not be original, but is nevertheless of a high quality. Faithfully copying the model conserved at San Lorenzo, it was painted in natural colors: pink flesh tints heightened a little on the cheekbones, light brown hair, a green crown of thorns, and a green base. The head, detached from the body at some point in the past, has been reapplied but the traces of restoration are still clearly visible. Moreover, a small hole at the top of the head was drilled, perhaps to affix a halo.

In like manner to the reliefs of the *Virgin and Child* (see pp. 36–37 and cat. 17), the *Bambino* of San Lorenzo has been frequently reproduced in terracotta, plaster, or stucco, often with the addition of color.

In this connection, as Jean-René Gaborit rightly reminds us, it is hard, unless a sample is taken, to distinguish between the different materials used in the sculptures, since the works are usually completely covered by one or more layers of paint (Gaborit 1987). Various examples are found in public collections: Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, stucco with traces of polychromy (inv. R. B. K. 16982); Staatliche Museen, Berlin, stucco (fig. 126); Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, stucco (inv. M.22-1950); Detroit Institute of Arts, polychrome stucco (inv. 22.223); Acton collection, Florence; Hyde Collection Art Museum, Glens Falls; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, stucco with traces of polychromy (inv. 3083).

The considerable popularity of this type of statuette can be linked with what Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (1982) calls the distribution of "holy dolls." The inventories of trousseaux described in domestic Florentine books of the second half of the 15th century register numerous male dolls given by parents to young brides. These effigies possessed an evident religious character and are associated with the figure of the infant Christ. While this type of *Bambino* was frequently conceived for display on private altars, it was also often given to young women when they married. An entire process of "religious education through play or imitation," "of apprenticeship to religion through play" could thus be instituted through the use of these images, given that, according to a devotional tract of 1454, a holy image could lead the worshiper to enjoy states of "sweetness and devotion" as a result of its contemplation. The success of this type of devotion makes the infatuation with this model, its replication, and its popularity well into the 16th century more understandable.

MB

27 DESIDERIO DA SETTIGNANO (after)

Christ Child Blessing, 16th century (?)

Marble
Statuette, H: 40.5 cm; W: 19.5 cm;
Depth: 8.0 cm
Plinth, H: 22.5 cm; W: 15.5 cm; Depth: 15.0 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département
des Sculptures, inv. RF 697

Restored in 2006 by Delphine Masson

PROVENANCE
Leclanché sale, Paris, Galerie Georges Petit, 23–25 May 1892, lot 58; Collection of Baron Jean-Charles Davillier, Paris. His bequest to the Musée du Louvre in 1884. The pedestal (more recent?) bears coats of arms that might be those of the Salviati family.

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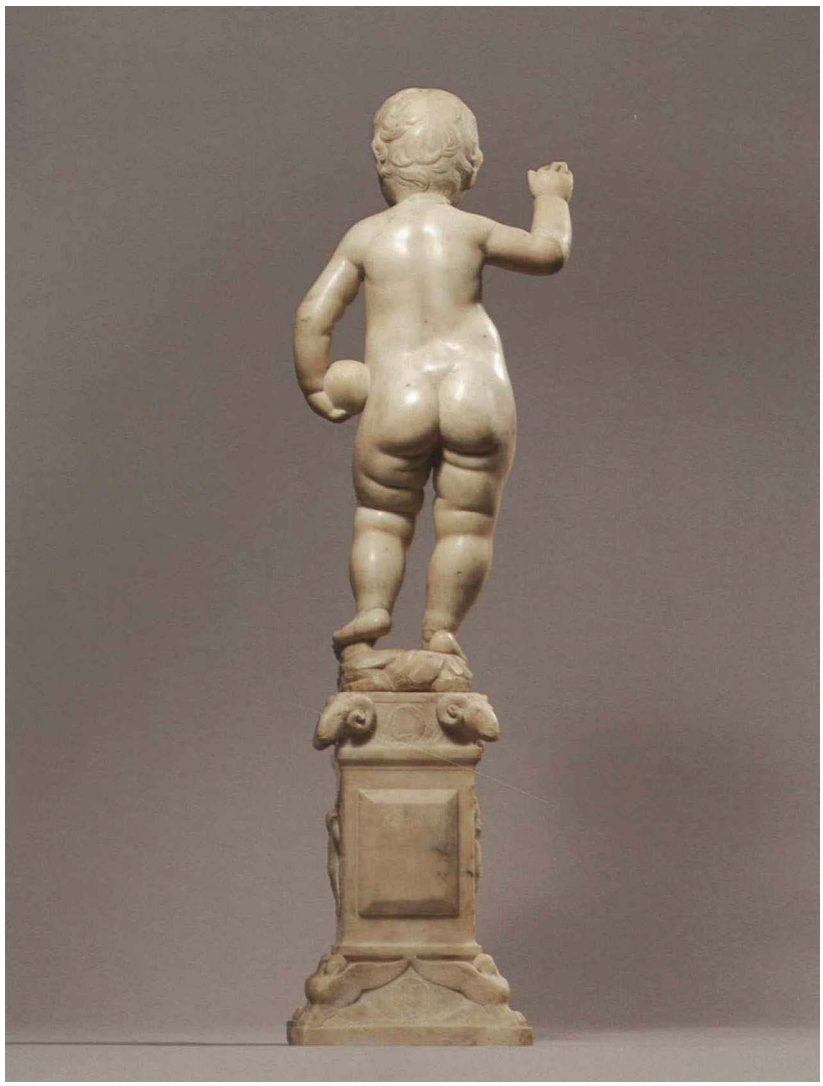

This example in marble is a good illustration of the success of the Desiderio model and the interest shown in the second half of the 19th century to this type of work by collectors of Renaissance sculpture. Smaller than the original, it differs from an iconographical point of view: in place of the crown of thorns and the nails of the Passion, the Child, here appearing as Salvator Mundi, holds a globe. The statuette's placement on an antique-style base, decorated with winged putti and sphinxes and heads of rams, indicates that it was an object for private devotion. Indeed, the arms sculpted on the base might be those of the Salviati family.

MB

BACK MATTER

Desiderio da Settignano
Detail of cat. 23
Base of the candlestick held by the
right-hand angel
San Lorenzo, Florence

GLOSSARY*

ACROTERION (plural, Acroteria)
A Greek term for the supports at the ends and at the apex of a triangular or curved pediment, often used also to designate the ornaments and figures surmounting them.

ANTEPENDIUM
A Latin term describing an altar frontal made of a textile, leather, or other soft material; by extension, a panel of wood, marble, or precious metal.

ANTIQUARIUM
A Latin term designating the location in which collections of antiques are kept.

BOTTEGA
An Italian term designating the workshop of artists and artisans during the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

CANTORIA
An Italian term designating the gallery reserved for choristers in a church. Those by Donatello and Luca della Robbia for the cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence are particularly important for the development of sculpture in Florence between 1430 and 1440.

CATASTO
An Italian term describing the administrative and fiscal census regularly undertaken in Florence beginning in 1427; it constitutes a unique source for studying the assets of tax-paying Florentines (and, in particular, the earnings received by artists).

COMMESSO (plural, *Commessi*)
An Italian term describing the inlay of colored stones, often semiprecious hard stones (*pietre dure*) sometimes known as Florentine mosaic.

CONDOTTIERE
An Italian term designating a mercenary captain. Such captains supplied the armies employed by Italian city-states during the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

CORTILE
An Italian term designating the courtyard of a building: frequently used for Renaissance palace courtyards, often bordered by open or closed galleries.

GRADINA
An Italian term for a toothed chisel used for roughing out sculpture. The teeth are varied in width and are sometimes pointed.

LAVABO
An Italian term describing a small basin placed near or in the sacristy in which the priest celebrating the Mass could wash his hands and clean the sacred vessels.

PALIOTTO
An Italian term designating an altar decoration, often fixed in place, covering the front and sometimes the sides and rear of an altar.

PIETRA SERENA
An Italian term describing a fine sandstone of a gray color, a type of *macigno*, especially used in Florence for architectural decoration and elements of decorative sculpture. The term *pietra bigia* is sometimes used for the darker grades of this material.

ROSSO ANTICO
An Italian term describing a deep red-colored, slightly russet marble, sometimes with white stripes, extracted by the Romans in a quarry at Matapan (Tenaro) in the south of the Peloponnese in Greece.

SPIRITELLO
An Italian term designating a figure inspired by the spirits of Greco-Roman antiquity, depicted in the Florentine quattrocento in the form of a young child, embodying a number of intangible sensations (music, drunkenness...).

STIACCIATO
A Tuscan variant of *schiacciato*, the Italian term now frequently used for shallow relief carving in stone, as introduced by Donatello in the second decade of the quattrocento, but (as Godby 1980 observes) the term seems originally to have been employed for a relief style with flattened form; the word indeed literally means flattened or mangled.

STUDIOLO
An Italian term, the diminutive of studio, designating a room in a Renaissance palace or house dedicated to intellectual study and cultivated recreation, frequently with decoration that reflected its function and sometimes furnished with books and precious objects, antiques, and works of art or curiosities.

TEMPIETTO
An Italian term, the diminutive of *tempio* (temple), designating a religious building of small size. Frequently used in the Renaissance to describe classical building with a round plan.

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