

Patronage during the italian renaissance

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Introduction

Imagine being an artist in Florence during the 1400-1500's. The city would be a lively place bursting with numerous aspiring artists. Of the young men learning their trade as best as possible, most will not achieve centuries of notoriety. The ones that do earn the honor of being remembered today all had a common theme; wealthy patrons, including wealthy individuals, guilds and the church. Throughout the Italian Renaissance, the artists who achieved the most success were the artists who acquired the most notable patrons.

Probably the most famous of these patrons were the Medici's and, like other patrons, they were rich and powerful. The power did not always come directly from running the government, but because they had enough financial influence over the people in the Florentine government they indirectly influenced how the area was run. This influence means they had connections with the most important people of their day, important people who would also create commissions for the artists. Powerful families were not only financially secure, but had excess money to spend on expensive items such as bronze sculptures.

For the patrons it was all about showing off what they could afford to other wealthy families. Wealthy families influenced the arts because they wanted to show off, it was politically wise, and they actually appreciated the arts. These reasons lead to a profound impact upon the patron-artist relationship and the art produced during the Italian Renaissance period. Patronage To Flaunt The Medici's were a highly affluent family and they desired to show off their excess wealth. Basically, they wanted to flaunt their wealth.

Once the more expensive things in life, such fancy clothes are bought and a fancy party provided for all the friends, what else is there to do with such an excess of money? Becoming a patron of the arts was not always in association with a love of art, but because the people who could afford it wanted to show off their wealth and prestige. One of the very best ways to do this was to purchase extravagant and expensive artwork, because it is long lasting and highly visual. One example of prestige is the tabernacle for the Church of the Annunziata in Florence.

It was commissioned by Piero d'Medici and the inscription states that the marble alone costs 4000 florins. (Burke, p 98) Another proof this reason for patronage was so common is the statement, " the majority of the types of commission just referred to were determined by the taste and outlook of the upper middle class. " (Antal, p134) Many other sources assert the same exact thing. Most commissions were done according to the taste of the upper middle class because they were the people competing with one another to have the most extraordinary art.

It is easy to invite people over and show the art to them or conveniently place artworks in public places to feature to clients and coworkers. This is a social practice widely used today and was in no way different during the Italian Renaissance. Political Scheming A wealthy person might support the arts based on politic scheming. If the wealth holder is a patron of the arts, then it shows he respects the talents of other men and is willing to support those other men. To quote Machiavelli, " A prince ought to show himself a lover of ability, giving employment to able men and honoring those who excel in a particular field. (Burke, p99) For someone with political aspirations,

living this type of life would prove to political supporters how aware he or she is of other people's abilities. And when someone supports those abilities as just a regular member of society, that support will likely increase as the person rises in power and wealth. The Medici's exemplified this by the amount of art they increasingly commissioned as they increased in wealth and climbed their way to control over Florence. An example of political scheming is Botticelli's Adoration of the Magi.

It was commissioned by Guasparre di Zanobi del Lama, to be an alter piece for a chapel in the Santa Maria Novella. Traditionally, paintings of the magi are painted to pay religious homage to Christ, and the Magi who travelled to see him. In this particular version, Botticelli paints likenesses of the Medici into the people including depicting Cosimo de'Medici as the Magi kneeling before Jesus. It is believed that he painted such a powerful family into the painting because of his patron's desires. Guasparre del Lama wanted the Medici painted as the prominent characters to show his respect for the powerful family.

People rarely show such a public display of adoration for a politically powerful family without having personal, underlying political motives. Ultimately, this man used his influence on the arts as a method of getting attention from the Medici family. (" Analysis: Botticelli's " Adoration of the Magi"" 2010) Positive Patron-Artist Relationships When the artists developed a positive relationship with the patron, it proved highly beneficial for the individual artists. These benefits were primarily financial, including the potential for more work from the same patron.

This can be seen many times over, including the example of Raphael with Pope Julius II. If the artist's work pleased the patron, they would be likely to hire the same artist for more art, which would in turn lead to a stable income for the artist. In order to please the patron, the artist had to follow their specifications. Raphael completed many masterpieces for the Pope, including 3 frescoes in the Vatican. These pieces are proof that in order to please the Pope, Raphael had to incorporate him into the art.

One source explained the School of Athens and the Disputa as the earthly and celestial wisdom of Julius II, while the Parnassus shows the beauty of creativity. The Expulsion of Heliodorus from the Temple symbolizes the expulsion of the French and the subjugation of all the church's enemies, with Julius II depicted witnessing the scene from his portable throne. In the Uffizi gallery in Florence there is a fresco completed by Raphael, showing the Pope as a resigned, pensive old man instead of a victorious Moses springing to his feet, as Michelangelo portrayed him.

What the artist wanted in his paintings was irrelevant compared with the need to please the patron and continue acquiring commissions. (Barnett 2007) Not all artist-patron relationships were entirely business oriented. For proof of this more positive impact, it requires a look at Michelangelo and Lorenzo de' Medici. Unlike Raphael and Pope Julius II, Michelangelo's relationship with Lorenzo Medici was much deeper. They were as close, if not closer than many fathers and sons.

Michelangelo lived with the Medici's for two years as a teenager because Lorenzo saw his talent and invited him to live at the Medici palace and study art while he was there. Lorenzo greatly appreciated his talents and was a

constant source of encouragement to the young Michelangelo. There was a tradition in the Medici household, that the most prominent people were allowed to sit down first, and Michelangelo was allowed to sit before Lorenzo's own son. Michelangelo returned the favor by carving the impressive marble relief, *The Battle of the Centaurs* for Lorenzo.

Because of the bond the two shared, it did not come as a surprise to anyone that he went into a temporary depression upon Lorenzo's death. Artists developing positive relationships with their patrons that heavily impacted their personal lives as well as their careers were rare for the time, but did occur on occasion and had an extended influence on their entire lives. Networking through Patronage Another major benefit that occurred from pleasing the patron was the networking. When the patron liked an artist, and another wealthy friend wanted to commission a piece of art, they would recommend the artist they liked most.

Most often, when the need for an artist was announced, the artists interested would begin pestering the patron. A letter would achieve the pestering if the artist was not currently in the same city. This constant bothering involved the artists convincing their wealthy connections to encourage the patron to select them or reminding the patron of the positives concerning their working relationship. In these cases, the patron would pick the artist based upon their own personal working relationship with the artist.

In 1474, news spread in Milan that the Duke wanted a chapel in Pavia to be painted. The duke's agent is recorded as complaining that all the painters, "good and bad" were bothering him about becoming the artist for the chapel. (Burke, 101-102) Trouble often arose concerning the contract between the

patron and artist over what had to be done, how it was to be done, when it would be done and how much it would cost. One well-known example requires looking at Michelangelo's experiences with Pope Julius II.

The strain between the two was constant and caused many complications. In order to get Michelangelo to paint the Sistine Chapel, Julius II had to first convince him to return to Rome. Something Michelangelo did with the assumption that pleasing the Pope would allow him to start working on the tomb again. How they agreed on what exactly was depicted in the Chapel does not have any specific source in the contracts, but most art historians would agree that it was a source of contention initially between the two obstinate men.

And as the work progressed, Pope Julius II would show up and create new tension by telling Michelangelo to work faster. Despite the constant struggles, the Sistine Chapel was completed, which is not true for every patron-artist relationship gone south. The relationship between the patron and artist could easily become strained resulting in frustration, unfinished works and a bad experience. But like the Pope, other wealthy families usually still commissioned paintings and sculptures because they enjoyed owning them. Even if working with an artist could be stressful.

Artists would in turn continue to complete works commissioned from frustrating patrons because they provided a continuous livelihood. (King, 2003) Other Patronage Topics Another question brought to mind by the Sistine Chapel is whether great art would exist if the patron was not there to fund the art and to push the artist. Not all patrons were quite as pushy as Pope Julius II, but all patrons had some kind of say in how the paintings and

sculptures were created. Proof of this is found in the surviving contracts from this time period.

Without these contractual agreements and without the constant bothering from the patrons, many artworks would probably never have been completed. Due to the artist getting distracted by other work or simply not being interested in that particular piece anymore. A type of art that has not yet been discussed yet is architecture. Patrons who commissioned buildings were typically guilds or major groups in society, instead of individuals. But these types of patrons also had major influences on the architects. Brunelleschi's Dome focuses on a major example of how the architects were influential.

These guild patrons often helped competitions to decide who got the work instead of just going and picking someone. In the book, Brunelleschi was the main focus, but other people were brought up, such as the people he worked with and competed against. Prestige is the main factor behind competition, and competing against people who are already well known would have been difficult, so for Brunelleschi to compete anyway must have required a high amount of confidence. Especially after the rivalry between Brunelleschi and Ghiberti sparked by the gates of paradise ompetition lead Brunelleschi to focus on architecture instead of goldsmith artwork. Meaning the challenge of capping Santa Maria del Fiore must have appealed to him so greatly; that he did not care whom else he competed against. Its very pleasing that he gets the ultimate victory of the Dome, because that is the main architectural aspect of Florence and the baptistery doors exist in the shadows of his masterpiece. This method of earning a commission fueled rivalries and

competition, which added to the competitive nature of art during the Italian Renaissance.

This competitive nature in turn created the best work possible from each artist. When recognized for winning a competition, the artist would achieve high levels of fame that could make a career noteworthy. (King, 2000)

Conclusion: Those with wealth affect everything because they are the ones with power. Art did not manage to escape that, especially throughout the Italian Renaissance. The motivation for each patron varied from political reasons, to the purpose of personal enjoyment, to the desire of flaunting to others.

Sometimes their impacts limited the artists, other times they helped the artist become better skilled and more notable. Either way, the relationship between the patrons and the artists heavily influenced the final artistic product.

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