Artificiality in Mannerism: the Influence of Self-fashioning

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Artificiality in Mannerism: The Influence of Self-fashioining

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Introduction

In the sixteenth century, Giorgio Vasari created a three-part history of Italian art in *Lives of the most eminent painters, sculptors and architects*. Born from the achievements of Giotto and Cimabue, he envisioned Italian art developing under the guidance of the fifteenth-century masters towards the perfection of Michelangelo. The establishment of the canon of art history in the nineteenth century followed Vasari’s vision of Italian art, dividing Renaissance studies into Pre-Renaissance, Early Renaissance, and High Renaissance; however, scholars excluded the artists of Vasari’s own generation—the so-called Mannerists—from the canon, or mentioned them only as transitional figures between the Renaissance and Baroque. The exclusion of the sixteenth-century artists echoed a trend established in the seventeenth century by Giovan Pietro Bellori to discredit the period for its artifice and stylization. Noting the style’s dependence on the *maniera*, or style, of the High Renaissance, he criticized the period for its *di maniera*, or mannered, appearance. Writing in the eighteenth century, Luigi Lanzi was the first to use the term *manierismo*, or mannerism, to describe the style, and he followed his seventeenth-century predecessor, censoring the style’s overt imitation of the High Renaissance. In the nineteenth century dividing the history of art into five principles, Heinrich Wölfflin excluded the troublesome Mannerists, who refused to fit

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1 Here *maniera* refers to the formal qualities of the High Renaissance style; however, it can also refer to a mode of behavior or deportment. For the seventeenth-century conception of the sixteenth-century style, see Giovan Pietro Bellori, *The Lives of Annibale & Agostino Carracci*, trans. Catherine Enggass (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968).

nicely into his categories, from his seminal *Principles of Art History*\(^3\). Walter F. Friedlaender and Max Dvořák were among the first to reconsider the period in the twentieth century\(^4\). Focusing on the art of Pontormo and El Greco respectively, both conceived of the style as an expressive and spiritual movement. In the 1960s, John Shearman and S.J. Freedberg focused and redefined the term Mannerism by reconsidering the sixteenth-century context of its root, the Italian word *la maniera*, and reevaluated the period’s significance in the history of art at last attributing a positive value to the term and its art\(^5\). Yet, much remains to be explored in defining and interpreting Mannerism.

As a period label, “Mannerism” remains problematic. Scholars have variously substituted “Late Renaissance” and “Maniera” for the term. But despite its lingering pejorative connotation, the term has been canonized. While inherently broad, and often oversimplified, period labels provide the student with a firm foundation from which to work and a standard by which to judge both the norm and variety of a period. Carrying the significance of the sixteenth-century *la maniera* into its modern usage, even across the degradation of subsequent centuries, Mannerism is the most apt period label available to the student and will be used in this paper. The definition of the period’s stylistic qualities and chronology is similarly problematic. Therefore, the first question posed by this paper is: what is Mannerism? By analyzing the period’s art and characters, this paper returns the term’s definition to its original, sixteenth-century context and finds the style’s

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clearest definition in Vasari’s writing and art\(^6\). While insistently pursuing the style’s original context, this paper’s definition of Mannerism benefits from a discussion of Roland Barthes’ “Rhetoric of the Image.” The second question to be raised is: how and why did this style develop at this time? In response, this paper argues that self-fashioning, paired with the influence of the High Renaissance, resulted in the Mannerist style in Italy in the sixteenth century. Stephen Greenblatt coined the term “self-fashioning” to describe the studied, purposeful, and artificial construction of identity in sixteenth-century English literature\(^7\). Following his example, art historians have applied the concept to Cosimo I de’ Medici’s image-building in Florence and the art and architecture of seventeenth-century art; however, scholars have scarcely studied the specific and extensive influence of self-fashioning on the development of Mannerism\(^8\). The oversight has given rise to many of the remaining dilemmas in studies of Mannerism. For as the influence of the High Renaissance and self-fashioning coalesced, a unique style defined by its assimilation of the maniera of past generations, its demonstration of

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\(^6\) With the need to contextualize historically the term and the style, Erwin Panofsky’s art theory provides the basis for this paper. His historical recreation functions as the first order of interpretation, and in each analysis, I will attempt to define the three parts of the image—form, idea or subject matter, and content—and recreate the “original intention of the works”. While many of Panofsky’s ideas may seem self-evident to the 21st-century art historian, they influence and guide modern scholarship, especially discussions of problematic periods like Mannerism, far more than is admitted; and therefore, in this paper I would like to immediately recognize Panofsky’s influence. See Erwin Panofsky, “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline,” in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), first published 1955.


artistic virtuosity, and the demand for a sophisticated viewer developed and created a self-conscious and artificial art of the greatest sophistication.

Having posited a definition of Mannerism, this paper turns to two exemplary practitioners of self-fashioning, Giorgio Vasari and Cardinal Alessandro Farnese. Both effectively employed self-fashioning as a means of social advancement and legitimization. In the second chapter, Vasari’s book, position at the Medici court, and efforts in establishing the Accademia del Disegno illustrate his personal and professional self-fashioning. Understanding the grandiosity of his aims and the necessity of crafting a sophisticated and cultured demeanor lays the foundation for appreciating his erudite artistic style, which is discussed in the third chapter. There, this paper explores Farnese patronage, and specifically Alessandro’s patronage, as an example of self-fashioning as a means of familial glorification and legitimization. While lasting for only three short years and producing only two works of art, *Justice* and the Sala dei Cento Giorni, the collaboration between Vasari and Alessandro is a unique and impressive example of artist’s and patron’s interests combining to reach the same goal, namely social distinction and advancement through self-fashioning in artistic production. In the end, one finds that the artistic style is an essential element of the artist’s and patron’s efforts at self-fashioning. The complexity of the iconography and artistic style declare the sophistication of the patron and artist and assert their deserving position in Rome’s most elite society.
I. Defining Mannerism

The process of defining Mannerism begins with Vasari’s conception of perfection in the *Lives*. Derived from the fifteenth-century humanist revival of Classical literature and philosophy, Vasari’s belief in perfection and perfectibility founded artistic achievement in the exercise of one’s God-given talents. Invested with reason, dignity, and skill, the artist possessed the means of perfection, and through perfection he achieved glory and fame: “It was the wont of the finest spirits in all their actions, through a burning desire for glory, to spare no labor, however grievous, in order to bring their works to that perfection which might render them impressive and marvelous to the whole world”⁹. Perfection was also the standard by which art was judged because it was believed to be attainable. To Vasari, Michelangelo (*il divino* as he called him) was perfection. But, a cycle of birth, growth, and decline accompanied perfection. The concepts were intricately interwoven. As Vasari writes in the Preface to the Second Part: “the nature of this art is similar to that of others, which, like human bodies, have their birth, their growth, their growing old, and their death”¹⁰. The cycle places Vasari and his contemporaries in a precarious position. If Michelangelo was perfection, and thus the apex of the cycle, art must decline after Michelangelo. However, in the writing of the period, most especially in the *Lives*, there is no recognition of decline. Seen by its contemporaries, the art of the sixteenth century was a continuation of the High Renaissance. The fifteenth-century style functioned as the new style’s foundation. Imitation of its masters was an essential part of artistic practice: “I know that our art is all imitation, of nature for the most part,

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and then because a man cannot by himself rise so high, of those works that are executed by those whom he judges to be better masters than himself”\(^1\). Through study, imitation, and combination, one progressed towards perfection, assimilating and advancing the style of preceding generations in the process.

Vasari characterized perfection by five principles: rule, order, proportion, draftsmanship, and manner. Enumerated in the Preface to the Third Part, these five principles were developed by the artists of the Quattrocento and perfected by the artists of the Cinquecento. Rule is the measurement and study of ancient buildings during the construction of modern buildings. Order is the use of Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Tuscan orders without interchange. The artist and architect make figures and buildings “correct and true” with proportion\(^1\). Draftsmanship, defined as “the imitation of the most beautiful parts of nature in all figures [done with] a hand and a brain able to reproduce with absolute accuracy and precision […] everything that the eye sees”, is the father of sculpture and painting\(^1\). The most significant for a study of Mannerist art is clearly the fifth, manner. It is the culmination of all of art’s desirable attributes, and it depends on study, imitation, and combination—in short, assimilation:

Manner then attained to the greatest beauty from the practice which arose of constantly copying the most beautiful objects, and joining together these most beautiful things, hands, heads, bodies, and legs, so as to make a figure of the greatest possible beauty. This practice was carried out in every work for all figures, and for that reason is called the beautiful manner\(^1\).

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\(^2\) Vasari, *Lives*, 221.
\(^3\) Vasari dedicated the majority of the Preface to the Whole Work to the debate as to the superiority of sculpture or painting (See Vasari, *Lives*, xxx-xxxix). The dispute was much discussed in Vasari’s time, appearing even in Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier*. However, Vasari settles it deftly by placing draftsmanship above them both.
The word is translated from the Italian \textit{la maniera} and carries the significance of style; however, the definition of \textit{maniera} varies with the definitions of Mannerism. In the sixteenth century, the term was complimentary and a desirable trait derived ultimately from the literature of courtly manners. Shearman’s two-part definition follows the term’s sixteenth-century context and ought to be quoted at length. He notes its literal and qualitative connotations:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Maniera} may in all cases be translated into the English word \textit{style}. We use our word in various ways, most often with some qualification, as when we talk of Giotto’s style, Byzantine style, abstract style, and so on. More rarely we use it absolutely; we say that a person, a performance or a man-made object (artifact or motor-car) \textit{has style}, or equally has not. In the same way \textit{maniera} was a possible, and in general desirable attribute of works of art […] The concept \textit{maniera} was borrowed from the literature of manners, and had been originally a quality—a desirable quality—of human deportment […] In turn the word had entered Italian literature from French courtly literature of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. There \textit{manièrè}, like its Italian derivative, meant approximately savoir-faire, effortless accomplishment and sophistication […] \textit{Maniera}, then, is a term of long standing in the literature of a way of life so stylized and cultured that it was, in effect, a work of art itself; hence the easy transference to the visual arts\textsuperscript{15}.
\end{quote}

The sixteenth-century Baldesar Castiglione echoes the “effortless accomplishment and sophistication” of the French \textit{manièrè}, listing \textit{sprezzatura}, or nonchalance, among the desirable attributes of the perfect courtier. Set at the Court of Urbino and mimicking ancient texts in its symposiac form, the First Book embodies, in its characters and their activities, the sophistication and self-consciousness of Italian courts\textsuperscript{16}. Many of the concepts that Vasari valorizes are present in the countenance and society of Duchess

\textsuperscript{15} Shearman, \textit{Mannerism}, 17-18.
\textsuperscript{16} The influence of ancient texts on sixteenth-century courtly manner and artistic style will only be suggested in this paper. It is, however, a significant area of study within the field. For further discussion of the influence of antiquity on the artistic style, see Craig Hugh Smyth, \textit{Mannerism and Maniera} (Locust Valley, NY: J.J. Augustin, 1963); Marcia Hall, \textit{After Raphael: Painting in Central Italy in the Sixteenth Century} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
Elisabetta Gonzaga, namely decorous behavior, freedom restrained by gracious and sober dignity, modesty, and nobility. The courtiers entertain themselves with an intellectual game, which Federico Fregoso suggests: “So to teach a lesson to the many fools who in their presumption and absurdity think they are entitled to be called good courtiers, I would like our game this evening to be this: that one of us should be chosen and given the task of depicting in words a perfect courtier.” The task falls to Count Lodovico da Canossa, and the game begins. The perfect courtier is of noble birth and a man of arms, skilled in all things associated with military service and demonstrating a fierce and brave personality. At the same time, he is beautiful and able to enjoy polite society. He is musical and artistic, and he must demonstrate taste in both. But most importantly, he is a student of maniera; and therefore he possesses an easy, graceful manner:

However, having already thought a great deal about how this grace is acquired, and leaving aside those who are endowed with it by their stars, I have discovered a universal rule which seems to apply more than any other in all human actions or words: namely, to steer away from affectation at all costs, as if it were a rough and dangerous reef, and (to use perhaps a novel word for it) to practice in all things a certain nonchalance [sprezzatura] which conceals all artistry and makes whatever one says or does seem uncontrived and effortless.

Like Vasari’s artist, he achieves perfection of style through study and imitation: “Just as in the summer fields the bees wing their way among the plants from one flower to the next, so the courtier must acquire this grace from those who appear to possess it and take from each one the quality that seems most commendable.” But, this is not a slavish imitation of his model. He practices discrimination, combining the most beautiful parts

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18 Castiglione, *Courtier*, 51.
19 Castiglione, *Courtier*, 67.
into *la bella figura*. Likewise, *la bella maniera* is an abstraction from and idealization of nature through assimilation. *Maniera*, then, in its sixteenth-century context, is a stylized mode of behavior (and in Vasari’s usage, artistic production), gleamed from a variety of sources and combined into the most beautiful form.

In the seventeenth century, style transformed into stylized, *maniera* into *manieroso* or *di maniera*. As Shearman notes, the term and value of *maniera* were inverted: “Changing prejudice often inverts the value of words while preserving most of their sense; virtues are turned into vices, artistic qualities become defects”\(^2\). Applied negatively, the term suggests a stylized, affected, or mannered art. The line between Castiglione’s *sprezzatura* and affectation is thin, and when critics of the succeeding generation, Giovan Pietro Bellori among them, looked on the development of sixteenth-century art after Raphael, they saw only affectation: “Thus, with the passing of that happy century all of its beauties quickly vanished. The artists, abandoning the study of nature, corrupted art with the *maniera*, that is to say, with the fantastic idea based on practice and not on imitation [of nature]”\(^2\). But even in his criticism, Bellori recognized the style’s dependence on the *maniera* of the High Renaissance. Assimilation of the High Renaissance style was a central tenant of artistic practice between 1520 and 1590, the period that was later called Mannerism. High Renaissance artists had achieved perfection; therefore, the sixteenth-century artist copied the masters’ art, working from perfection rather than nature’s deficiencies. Yet in Bellori’s estimation, it is a point of derision; and thus, he introduced the concept of decline to the interpretation of sixteenth-century art: “art […] was seen to decline rapidly and from a queen become humble and

common”. However, the concept was already inherent in the cycle of perfection established by Vasari, and as artistic taste changed, the unhappy position fell to Vasari and his contemporaries.

Criticized for its artifice and stylization, the period carried with it the negative manieroso well into the twentieth century. Even Friedlaender, among the first to reevaluate the period, criticized the mid-century painters for their di maniera style, a style which in his estimation became “tedious and unbearable” in its repetition of forms taken from predecessors’ styles. In his view, the seventeenth-century reacted against these artists, not the artists of the early fifteenth century: “But the real enemy was, as we have said, the mannered Mannerism of the second phase, against whose shallowness, even in spiritual matters, the reform which set in around 1580 was directed. The aggressive purpose of the new movement was to cut loose from the degeneration of form just as much as from the degeneration of the spiritual into the playful and allegorical”. Most boldly, he writes: “there was no outstanding personality in the whole lot”. Finally, in the 1960s, scholars like Shearman and Freedberg began to revisit the term, increasingly returning to its sixteenth-century context. As maniera was redefined, the definition of “Mannerism” as a period label came into question, and scholars began to ask if Mannerism could be freed from the cycle of perfection and judged by its own aesthetic standards. In short, they asked, what is Mannerism? The question remains today.

The debate as to Mannerism’s stylistic qualities and chronology can be divided broadly into two significant veins. In the first, Friedlaender and Arnold Hauser characterize the style as a reactionary and revolutionary style. Friedlaender describes the

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23 Bellori, Lives, 5-6.
24 Friedlaender, Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism, 48.
25 Friedlaender, Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism, 50.
style as the “anti-classical style” and dates its most influential manifestation to the decades immediately following the High Renaissance (1520-50). He argues that a tacit system of rules was established in the High Renaissance, creating an “ideal art” which subjugated the body and its movement to an objective conception of beauty. One finds this readily in the idealized bodies of Michelangelo’s art and the development and predominance of linear perspective. The “subjective, purely optical, impression” was subjugated to the period’s idealized beauty. Mannerism then is a reaction against the High Renaissance’s standardization and “objectivization” of beauty. Art becomes an “imaginative idea unsupported by imitation of nature” or a “rejection of the normative and the natural”. It is no longer a question of creating a seen object in an artistically new way, “just as one sees it,” or “just as one ought to see it,” or even “as I see it,” but rather, “as, from purely autonomous artistic motives, one would have it seen”26. As demonstrated in Pontormo’s *Descent from the Cross* (Figure 1) and Rosso Fiorentino’s *Descent from the Cross* (Figure 2), the style is formally characterized by distorted proportions, elongation, exaggerated movement, asymmetry, spatial distortions, and the emphasis on the body over space—all those things abhorred by the High Renaissance27. It is artificial, man made, and lacking naturalness. Therefore, it is a “deliberate denial of the classical aesthetic rather than the result of continued imitation of Renaissance forms”28.

Hauser follows Friedlaender, defining the style as a moment of revolt against the classicism of the High Renaissance: “Mannerism marked a revolution in the history of art

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27 Friedlaender does not discuss Pontormo’s *Descent from the Cross*; however, its predominance in discussions of Mannerism has defined it as an exemplifying Mannerist work.
28 Donald Posner, introduction to *Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism*, xiii.
and created entirely new stylistic standards; and the revolution lay in the fact that for the first time art deliberately diverged from nature”\textsuperscript{29}. Thus, like Bellori, Friedlaender and Hauser note the style’s abandonment of the study of nature; however, as was suggested by Shearman, artistic taste changes, and in the twentieth century, abstraction from nature became a commendable attribute and the means by which Mannerism might be reevaluated. In Hauser’s analysis, this revolt, or anti-classicism, was inspired by a developing anti-humanism, which rejected the “predominance of reason” and the “principles of order, proportions, and subservience to rules”\textsuperscript{30}. A spiritual crisis resulted, leading to the disjunction of form and content as artists continued to use High Renaissance forms but rejected their Neo-Platonic meaning: “The crisis of the Renaissance began with the doubt whether it was possible to reconcile the spiritual with the physical, the pursuit of salvation with the pursuit of terrestrial happiness. Hence mannerist art—and this is probably its most unique feature—never confronts the spiritual as something that can be completely expressed in material form”\textsuperscript{31}. In short, Mannerism was a reaction against the idealism and idealization of the High Renaissance, in which the subjective was subordinated to the objective standard. While much of Hauser’s theory is founded on Italian art from about 1520 to 1600, his definition is expansive, including El Greco and Shakespeare, and he differentiates between the “courtly form of mannerism” represented by Bronzino and Parmigianino and the “academic intellectualism of Vasari and Salviati”\textsuperscript{32}.

\textsuperscript{30} Hauser, \textit{Mannerism}, 9.
\textsuperscript{31} Hauser, \textit{Mannerism}, 10.
\textsuperscript{32} Hauser, \textit{Mannerism}, 17.
Despite the variety that Hauser’s definition allows, three other characteristics define the style in addition to abstraction from nature: tension, piquancy, and paradox. Tension results from the conflicting movements of the period, “classicism and anti-classicism, naturalism and formalism, rationalism and irrationalism, sensualism and spiritualism, traditionalism and innovation, conventionalism and revolt against irreconcilable opposites”33. The period’s taste for the provocative and the bizarre, or its “piquancy”, develops from the continual demonstration of artistic virtuosity and the sophistication of its audience. The final characteristic, paradox, arises from the period’s tension:

Everything is expressed in extremes opposed to other extremes, and it is only by this paradoxical pairing of opposites that meaningful statement is possible […] But its most remarkable feature is not the simultaneous presence and proliferation of contradictions, but the frequent lack of differentiation between them, and their interchangeability34.

And here, one uncovers the central problem of both Friedlaender’s and Hauser’s theories, namely the characterization of the style as a reactionary movement.

In Hauser’s analysis, anti-classicism is anti-humanism, a spiritual crisis in which the harmony of Renaissance humanism is rejected and the disparity of existence emphasized. Likewise, Friedlaender interprets the period as an expressive movement against the objectivity of the Renaissance. Neither is commensurate with the sixteenth-century mindset. As one reads Friedlaender and Hauser, one notes the obvious influence of modern movements to the detriment of their analyses. Writing in the first decades of the twentieth century, and thus influenced by the popularity of Expressionism, Friedlaender praises the expressive qualities of the early Mannerists, undervaluing, if not

33 Hauser, Mannerism, 12.
completely rejecting, the accomplishments of the mid-century painters. Hauser’s
discussion of paradox is strikingly reminiscent of Structuralist and Post-Structuralist
theories and wholly misguided in its application to the sixteenth-century. While art
history can never be, nor should it be, fully objective, and the definition and
interpretation of a style will always be influenced by the scholar’s place in history, the art
historian ought to seek out the “original intention” of the works to the best of his or her
ability; otherwise, the distinction of art history and art criticism is blurred, and the work
is never judged fairly by its own context and standards. Friedlaender’s contribution to
the study of Mannerism should not be understated. Mannerism’s revival owes much to
his seminal study. In addition, one should not be limited by the historical recreation.
Modern ideas and theories are often elucidating, and in this paper Roland Barthes’
“Rhetoric of the Image” will prove essential; however, one must be vigilant against the
temptation to inject modern ideas into the sixteenth-century mindset. Mannerism must
first be defined within its historical context.

Shearman proposes an alternative definition in Mannerism, calling the style “the
stylish style” and illustrating it with a later work by Rosso, The Dead Christ with Angels
(Figure 3), and Giovanni Bologna’s Rape of the Sabine (Figure 4). He identifies several
interdependent concepts that pervade the style. Practice is defined as the adherence to
stylistic convention and technical expertise. It is inherently linked with Vasari’s
emphasis on design, including the study of order and proportion, and the resulting
manner, or the creation of the most beautiful figures through study and combination of
the most beautiful parts. Through study and imitation, or practice and assimilation, the
artist creates the most beautiful figure from disparate parts. As Marcia Hall explains, it is

35 Again, note Panofsky’s influence.
an “alternative to nature,” or a beauty abstracted from nature and based on the artist’s concetto and disegno\textsuperscript{36}. Therefore, artifice, imitation, and abstraction from natural beauty fall under practice. In imitating the old masters, as Vasari encourages the artist to do, the artist will inevitably produce “artificial” works abstracted from nature, or works imitating nature but improving on it. Likewise, the conception of invention, difficulty, and facility are linked. The artist’s ability to invent is based on his diligent study; however, the creation of art is not intended to be laborious. The praise of difficulty is associated with the concept of virtue as the conquest of difficulty; and thus, it leads to facility, or easy invention. The result is an art of complex parts defined by the ease and nonchalance, or sprezzatura, of the artist’s creation\textsuperscript{37}. Clearly based on Vasari’s writings and courtly literature, Shearman’s definition describes a style that develops from, not against, the High Renaissance.

It is evident in Vasari’s writings that he viewed his art and the art of his contemporaries as a continuation of the achievements of the High Renaissance; therefore, Friedlaender’s and Hauser’s insistence on the period’s revolutionary break with the classical style is unsuitable in an analysis of the art of Vasari and his contemporaries. But certainly, these artists were working from something like Friedlaender’s idea of creation as “one would have it seen,” as evidenced by the style’s abstraction from nature. Art is no longer based on the study of nature; instead, it increasingly focuses on the imitation of style, or maniera. While Vasari advocates the study of nature, his definition of maniera as the copying and combination of disparate parts from various models and his own artistic practice places artistic production solidly within the sphere of the intellect.

\textsuperscript{36} Hall, After Raphael, 160.
\textsuperscript{37} Shearman, Mannerism, 15-25. Note that all terms are translated from Italian to English.
and imagination. For Vasari then, the art of the third period, what is now called the High Renaissance, is artificial; and thus, Friedlaender’s conception of artificiality as “anti-classical” remains problematic. In his analysis, subjectivity determines artificiality which in turn leads to emotional immediacy. In fact, he insists on the style’s hyper-spirituality and expressiveness. Describing Pontormo, the father of Mannerism in his analysis, he writes “above all an expression rising from the depth of the soul and hitherto unknown in this age and style [is present]”38. Similarly, Hauser attributes the style’s development to the deep psychological rift caused by the humanist crisis succeeding the Renaissance. Expressiveness in both analyses supersedes artificiality, and artificiality then is naturalized by the expression of emotion. While the artist employs an exaggerated and often dissonant technique that is no longer based on the study of nature and derived instead from the study of maniera, the expression of emotion to the viewer, without mediation, seeks to transverse art’s artificiality, mitigating the human product (namely the work of art) between the artist and the viewer. Emotional immediacy becomes another form of naturalism, “using art to conceal art”39. Furthermore, emotional immediacy is absent in the works of the mid-century, demanding a distinction between the Florentine works of the 1520s and the mid-century painters in Rome and elsewhere. The cooled and stylized emotion of Bronzino’s Venus, Cupid, Folly, and Time (Figure 5) and of Vasari’s Allegory of the Immaculate Conception (Figure 6) is strikingly artificial. Without the naturalizing effect of emotional immediacy or the imitation of nature, the style is defined by its artificiality.

38 Friedlaender, Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism, 24.
S.J. Freedberg identifies artificiality as the defining characteristic of Mannerism, or the Maniera style: “In almost all the variants of the Maniera style there is a common denominator, recognizable despite the many different ways in which it may be given: an affect of conscious artifice, or indeed of artificiality”\(^{40}\). The source of this artificiality is the influence of the High Renaissance maniera: “The great accomplishments of the classical style stood between the Maniera painter and the world of nature like a screen”\(^{41}\). Assimilating the maniera of the High Renaissance, as Castiglione’s courtier fashions la bella figura and Vasari’s artist creates la bella maniera from multiple examples, the mid-century painter creates “one art out of the material of another”\(^{42}\). Therefore, Mannerist imitation leads to abstraction and artificiality. Naturalism is subjugated to artifice. Yet, Freedberg hesitates before conceding the bold and purposeful artificiality of Mannerism. He admits the reversal of the naturalizing principle—or the predominance of artificiality—but reverses his argument, asserting: “This existence of the whole image, essentially abstracting as it may be, is asserted by the extreme truth of disparate fragments of it […] The validity of sheer aesthetic device affirms a power of existence in the figures, whether that existence has been truthfully described or not”\(^{43}\). Art conceals art, and artifice is again subjugated to naturalism, or the representation of natural forms and existence.

Roland Barthes’ identification of the three messages given by an image (the linguistic, the coded iconic, and the non-coded iconic) in “Rhetoric of the Image” provides the foundation for an analysis of Mannerist artificiality that seeks to recognize

\(^{41}\) Freedberg, “Observations,” 118.
the style’s artificiality without recourse to the naturalizing principle. Referring to the non-coded iconic, Barthes wrote:

we never encounter a literal image in a pure state […] the letter of the image corresponds in short to the first degree of intelligibility […] but this intelligibility remains virtual by reason of its very poverty, for everyone from a real society always disposes of a knowledge superior to the merely anthropological and perceives more than just the letter.

Therefore, one can move quickly beyond this non-coded iconic to the linguistic, or the verbally articulated significance of a work. The linguistic serves only to anchor the painting’s “floating chain of signifieds” or to narrow and focus the viewer’s attention. It functions much the same way as slide identifications on an art history exam or a museum wall text. In the sixteenth century, inscriptions and accompanying explanatory texts guided the viewer through the complex iconography. The more interesting and analytical task is interpreting the coded iconic message.

Barthes identifies three sources of the coded nature of the drawing (which can also be applied to painting) from which one may conclude that art, not just Mannerism, is essentially artificial. First, rule-governed transpositions invest the image with implicit cultural significance. He notes: “There is no essential nature of the pictorial copy and the codes of transposition are historical.” Second, the impurity of style or the subjectivity of the artist taints the “pure” image: “the operation of drawing (the coding) immediately necessitates a certain division between the significant and the insignificant […] for there is no drawing without style.” Finally, apprenticeship, or the effects of training,

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44 The “naturalizing principle” may be defined as the tradition of naturalism in Western art in which the artificiality of the image is hidden by illusionism (perspective, modeling, etc) and the image functions as a “window on the world”.
completes the image’s coded nature. One concludes that art is artificial. It is contrived, and it is motivated; therefore, artificiality is not unique to Mannerism. In fact, Erwin Panofsky identifies it as one of the essential qualities of art: “[Art is] a man-made object demanding to be experienced aesthetically.” However, in most instances, art veils itself in the guise of naturalness and attempts to manipulate the viewer. The artificiality of art is hidden, and artificiality is “naturalized.”

Barthes illustrates the coded nature, or artificiality, of the image by analyzing an advertisement. While the sophisticated viewer expects contrived naturalness in images intended to manipulate or motivate the viewer like an advertisement or political propaganda, he or she finds the “myth of naturalness” in the history of art as well. From the mastery of the human form in Classical art, to the development of linear perspective in the Renaissance, to even, although more subtly, the expressionism of modern art, the naturalizing principle has guided the Western tradition. Consider, for example, the use of linear perspective in Masaccio’s *Holy Trinity with the Virgin, St. John, and Two Donors* in which the naturalization of space is used to further the religious and humanistic significance, Andrea Mantegna’s Cameria Picta in which naturalization is used as a visual game meant to fool the viewer’s eye, and even Friedlaender’s emotional immediacy in which artificiality is neutralized by the expression of human emotion. Mannerism in its mature form, however, represents the inversion of the naturalizing principle. Mannerism boldly declares itself to be purposely and intentionally artificial and seeks to emphasize its artificiality. In Mannerism, the very essence of art—its artificiality, as noted by Barthes—is left undisguised and celebrated.

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A fourth source of the coded nature of art, which this paper calls artificiality, must be added to Barthes’ three sources when discussing Mannerist art: the development of self-fashioning, or the studied, purposeful, and artificial construction of identity by the patron and the artist. While this concept is not unique to the sixteenth century or to Italian art, its development and application in the period combined with the tremendous influence of the High Renaissance explains why this style developed at this point in history and in this artistic center. The patron and artist began to use artistic production as a means of social mobility and distinction. Through the increasingly erudite and sophisticated nature of art, the patron displayed his intellectual and cultural status among the elite; and likewise, the artist moved from craftsman to artist courtier, claiming a place for his craft among the liberal arts. Stephen Greenblatt recognized the development of self-fashioning in sixteenth-century English literature. He argues:

Self-fashioning is in effect the Renaissance version of these control mechanisms, the cultural system of meanings that creates specific individuals by governing the passage from abstract potential to concrete historical embodiment. Literature functions within this system in three interlocking ways: as manifestation of the concrete behavior of its particular authors, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes.

Greenblatt works from the conclusion that art, and here literature, is a reflection of the culture in which it is produced. Expanding Greenblatt’s theory to the visual arts, a work of art is a reflection of the artist and patron, a reflection of the period’s culture, and an interpretation of the culture. Therefore, as the concept of self-fashioning developed in the sixteenth century, the art of the period began to reflect the growing self-consciousness of its artists and patrons.

The Roman society in which Cardinal Alessandro Farnese and, for a few years, Vasari operated was divided into three hierarchical, elite classes: baronial families, papal families, and untitled *gentilhuomini romani*\(^51\). While its members respected the rank and honor of these classes, it was surprisingly flexible, and nepotism and intermarriage were the primary means of social mobility. Wolfgang Reinhard explains the importance of nepotism, noting the two social functions of nepotism, namely the “supporting function” and the “controlling function”\(^52\). These may be called alternatively the dynastic and political functions. In the first, Roman society tolerated, and even encouraged, the natural inclination to support and share the benefits of office with one’s family; however, the “supporting function” often transformed into dynasty building as popes funneled papal benefices to their relatives and pursued political agendas designed to benefit their family. In the second, popes guaranteed the reliability of their advisers by choosing appointees from their family. With the highly political, and on occasion dubious, environment of the Roman curia, the “controlling function” was a source of security for the pope. Unfortunately, appointees were often less qualified than their competition, and the practice was abused as a means of political revenge. But, despite the manner in which the system was often abused, nepotism met with widespread approval. One aspect of it remained problematic. It was, fundamentally, against the teachings of the Church; and therefore, those who enjoyed its benefits sought a means of legitimization. The first was intermarriage, through which papal families rose to the status of baronial families. The second means of legitimization was artistic patronage. Papal families used artistic

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\(^51\) Ehrlich, *Landscape and Identity*, 21-22.

patronage to apologize for the un-doctrinal practice of nepotism and to legitimize the practice through the glorification of the pope and his family. Furthermore, through the commissioning of works of art, the nepotistic, ecclesiastic noble defined himself as a magnanimous patron with skill and sophistication worthy of the highest levels of society and as a man of virtue befitting an ecclesiastic. Like the perfect courtier, the ecclesiastic noble fabricated a persona of extreme sophistication, with which he defined himself and his family, legitimizing their social status. Identity was crafted. A palpable self-consciousness and artificiality pervades the period, in its art and its members’ identities.

While self-fashioning developed in the hands of patrons in the fifteenth century, the sixteenth century witnessed a new facet of its use. Artists began to use the practice to their own ends, and Vasari was a master of self-fashioning, manipulating the social structure to his benefit. As Patricia Lee Rubin asserts, Vasari understood and worked within prevailing formulas in the social and artistic spheres: “Vasari […] felt that both social identity and professional advancement depended upon being sensitive to the forms of modern life: to usages that were equated with breeding (creanza) and to their expression in a changing language of courtesy.” Like the perfect courtier, he was a student of maniera. Through imitation and combination, he crafted, for himself, a style of deportment that equated him with the most sophisticated and learned members of the court. More than an artist, he characterized himself as a courtier: “The mastery of acceptable manners and modes of behavior was his introduction to the company of the

cultured (persone letterate) and the ruling elite upon whom he depended\textsuperscript{56}. Similarly, the sophisticated nature of his art was a means of social advancement. In his artistic theory, he valued conception over execution. While much time is given to the “manners and methods” employed by the artists, idea (ingegno) is the source of virtue (virtù)\textsuperscript{57}.

“Virtù is an all-important and untranslatable word, meaning a man’s true exercise of his gifts\textsuperscript{58}. These gifts, for the artist, are the mind and the hand, but the mind is the superior: “They say, next, that the true difficulties lie rather in the mind than in the body, wherefore those things that from their nature call for more study and knowledge are more noble and excellent than those that avail themselves rather of the strength of body”\textsuperscript{59}. This had long been the accusation against the visual arts, excluding them from the liberal arts. Vasari’s art and writing were a public and determined treatise on the status of the artist. In both, he emphasized the intellect, that essential element which was theorized to be excluded from artistic production, and raised the status of the artist to artist courtier.

During the course of the sixteenth century in Italy, the fusion of the High Renaissance style with the development of the self-fashioning of the patron and artist contributed to the generation of the development of Mannerism. Limited to the years between 1520 and 1590, with its defining manifestation in the works of the mid-century painters, Mannerism is a self-conscious style defined by its artificiality. It takes as its defining qualities the essential qualities of art, namely artificiality and aesthetic value. Openly celebrating its artifice, it achieves “purity” through the continual emphasis on

\textsuperscript{56} Rubin, Giorgio Vasari, 52.
\textsuperscript{57} Vasari, Lives, 63.
\textsuperscript{59} Vasari, Lives, xxxiv-xxxv.
these most essential qualities\textsuperscript{60}. In short, it defines itself as art. It was unique to its time; it could not have developed in another period, and it could not have survived into the next. However, its inversion of the naturalizing principle provides an intriguing foil to the “myth of naturalness” as described by Barthes. Formed by the three sources of the coded nature of the drawing, as enumerated by Barthes, and the self-fashioning of the artist and patron, the Mannerist work is truly the “man-made object demanding to be experienced aesthetically”, and reveling in the aesthetic experience.

\textsuperscript{60} The idea of “purity” was described by Greenberg in reference to Modern painting. While disagreeing with much of his theory and appropriating the term in order to describe a different artistic period, the definition of purity as self-definition has greatly influenced my conception of Mannerism. Rather than limiting purity to the characteristics of the material, as Greenberg does insistently, I open the term to embrace the essential elements of art, as I believe the Mannerist artist did. See Greenberg, “Modernist Painting,” 5-10.
II. Vasari and Self-fashioning

The preceding chapter defined Mannerism as a self-conscious and artificial style, characterized by the overwhelming influence of the High Renaissance *maniera* and the development of self-fashioning. More basically, it identified artificiality as art’s most essential quality, noting that Mannerism, unlike other periods in the Western tradition, emphasized its abstractive and imitative qualities, basing its style not on the imitation of nature but on the imitation of *maniera*. The previous chapter also noted that the artificial construction of identity, or self-fashioning, by patrons and artists in the sixteenth century affected the course of stylistic development. As Stephen Greenblatt defines it: “fashioning may suggest the achievement of a less tangible shape: a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving”\(^62\). In short, it is the purposeful construction of identity through the molding and shaping of character. Discussed generally in the previous chapter, this concept of self-fashioning will be applied more pointedly here to Giorgio Vasari’s construction of a professional identity for himself and his fellow artists.

Giorgio Vasari was an exemplar of self-fashioning and social mobility. Manipulating the social conventions of the day, he ascended the social hierarchy, and like the sixteenth-century authors that Greenblatt discusses, “moved out of a narrowly circumscribed social sphere and into a realm that brought [him] in close contact with the powerful and the great”\(^63\). However, as a means of social mobility, self-fashioning was

\(^{61}\) Here *maniera* refers to the formal qualities of the High Renaissance style.
\(^{62}\) Greenblatt, *Self-fashioning*, 2. While Greenblatt is discussing sixteenth-century English, the significance of this usage remains in modern English; and therefore, it can be applied with ease in a modern analysis without losing its sense or meaning.
not uncommon in sixteenth-century Italy. Like Baldesar Castiglione’s courtier, many artists and patrons constructed a stylized mode of courtly behavior in order to raise or legitimize their social standing. For Vasari, a man from humble origins, self-fashioning was essential and inescapable; it was his ticket to success. What distinguishes Vasari from his contemporaries is the grandiosity of his aims and his phenomenal success. In all of his labors, he sought to redefine, not only himself, but the artist as a courtier; therefore, his own identity ought to be read as a declaration of his ambitions for his craft and his colleagues. Seen most clearly in the *Lives*, his position at the Medici court, and the establishment of the Accademia del Disegno in Florence, his efforts redefined the status of the artist and exemplified the potentiality of self-fashioning.

Vasari’s modest background motivated and necessitated his later efforts; however, he was never ashamed of his origins, viewing them with pride and referring to them as proof of fortune’s kindness. He was born in Arezzo in 1511 to a family of painters, potters, and craftsmen⁶⁴. In fact, his name derives from *vasaio*, or potter. In Arezzo, he trained under Guillaume de Marcillat, a glass painter who, having worked for Julius II in Rome, knew the Roman works of Raphael and Michelangelo. In 1524, he went to Florence. Through the connections of a distant relative, Cardinal Silvio Passerini, he entered the Medici court, studying with the young Medici heirs, Alessandro and Ippolito. While in Florence, he trained in the workshops of Andrea del Sarto and Baccio Bandinelli. After the Medici were expelled in 1527, he returned to Arezzo for two short years before returning to Florence in 1529 as a goldsmith apprentice. In 1532 he traveled

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⁶⁴ Rubin’s *Giorgio Vasari* is the most comprehensive discussion of Vasari’s life, and for that reason I have relied on it for the facts of Vasari’s biography. See also Robert Walter Carden, *The Life of Giorgio Vasari: a Study of the Later Renaissance in Italy* (London: P.L. Warner, 1910); Boase, *Giorgio Vasari*. 
to Rome in Cardinal Ippolito de’ Medici’s entourage. In what must have been an ideal period, he studied Rome’s ancient ruins and High Renaissance masterworks with his friend, Francesco Salviati, who like Vasari would become one of central Italy’s most respected painters and a leader of what is now called Mannerism. Vasari remained in the service of the Medici for five years until Duke Alessandro de’ Medici’s assassination in 1537 drove him from Florence to the secluded monastery of Camaldoli. There, Bindo Altoviti commissioned him to paint the altarpiece for his family’s chapel in Santi Apostoli in Florence. Installed in 1541, the sophisticated and complex *Immaculate Conception* became the period’s prototypical image of the theme. In many ways, it was Vasari’s masterwork. The success of this painting earned him Altoviti’s support, through whom he obtained the commission to paint a figure of Justice for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, one of Rome’s leading patrons of the arts in the 1540s. Pleased with his *Justice*, the cardinal welcomed Vasari into his court and commissioned from him the grand fresco cycle for the Palazzo della Cancelleria’s audience hall, now known as the Sala dei Cento Giorni. It was during this period that the idea of the *Lives* developed.

As Vasari relates the tale, while painting the Sala dei Cento Giorni, he often dined with the cardinal and his illustrious guests. One night the conversation turned to the idea of Paolo Giovio writing a book about the lives of the most famous painters as a means of complimenting his collection of artist portraits. The cardinal deferred to Vasari’s opinion, asking for his insight as an artist. Politely, Vasari responded that while Giovio demonstrated a great deal of knowledge on the subject, he had confused some facts. He encouraged Giovio but recommended that he work with a painter who might elucidate the technicalities of painting to him. As the discussion continued, the cardinal again turned
to Vasari suggesting that he, Vasari, provide Giovio with the necessary details. As the project progressed, the responsibility of writing the *Lives* fell to Vasari. Like many of Vasari’s stories in the *Lives*, scholars have pointed to the impossibilities of his tale.

Several of the dinner guests that he names were either not in Rome at the time or, quite astonishingly, dead. And, Vasari had begun research for the book well before 1546. However, the fictional nature of Vasari’s *Lives* is part of its charm and eloquence. In this recount, he subtly suggests his views on patron-artist relationships in the deference with which the cardinal addresses him and the liberty of speech he enjoys in the cardinal’s presence. The narrative also demonstrates his ambition for the position of the artist. In Farnese’s court, the artist is a learned member, equal to men of letters and science. Furthermore, it illustrates his self-definition through the book. Because modesty is a laudable virtue, he feigns modesty, insisting that he had no intention to write the *Lives*, but when a magnanimous patron like Farnese asked him to confront a task of such significance, he could not decline. Thus, in this story of the conception of the *Lives*, the reader sees Vasari as a modest but obedient man who confronts difficult tasks with diligence and as a result enjoys a respected position in the court hierarchy.

After the publication of the first edition of the *Lives* in 1550 until his death in 1574, Vasari divided his time between Arezzo, Florence, and Rome. In Arezzo, he lovingly decorated his home with personifications of the Fine Arts and famous artists.

Employed by Pope Julius III in Rome, he worked on a number of projects, including the

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65 See Carden, *Giorgio Vasari*. While Carden’s work has been superseded by more modern scholars, I enjoy his translation for its narrative quality, especially in its recount of the conception of the *Lives*.


67 Scholars have increasingly focused on the Casa Vasari in Arezzo for its insight into Vasari’s vision of the history of art. For example, see Liana Cheney, *The Homes of Giorgio Vasari* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006).
collaborative effort with Bartolomeo Ammannati in the del Monte chapel in San Pietro in Monotorio. In 1554, he entered the service of Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici, focusing much of his attention on the renovations in the Palazzo Vecchio. He remained in the service of the Medici until the end of his life, working after 1564 for Cosimo I’s son, Francesco, and in 1570 decorating the well-known studiolo for the new duke. In 1568, he published the expanded edition of the Lives. In this period, Vasari traveled extensively and was patronized by Pius IV and Pius V in Rome, returning always to Florence. He died in 1574. A true son of Arezzo, he was buried in his family’s tomb in that city. While his career spanned nearly fifty years, the publication of the Lives in 1550 and 1568 solidified his reputation in his own time and guaranteed his importance for generations to come.

The desire to offer guidance to artists, elevate their status, and immortalize the greatest artists of the past motivates the book. It also offers insight into Vasari’s identity and ambition. This paper considers two principle examples of his self-fashioning in the Lives. First, he associates himself with Italy’s leading men, artists and intellectuals. Subtly imposed throughout the Lives, his presence is most notable in the life of Michelangelo. The practice of introducing himself into the lives of famous men reflects his mastery of the established system of patronage in sixteenth-century Italy. Second, in the lives of virtuous artists, he describes the system of social conventions in which artists lived. The virtues that he praises are the virtues to which he aspires. While his presence pervades the Lives, he sublimates it within the lives of other artists. However, by noting the men he admires and the virtues that he praises in the Lives, one may slowly sketch the identity that he labored to construct in his writing and art.
Vasari moved flawlessly in Italy’s established system of patronage. Through the purposeful construction of an educated and well-read demeanor, he skillfully maneuvered himself into the society of the ruling elite. As noted above, Vasari’s introduction into Florentine society relied on the patronage of a distant relative. Rubin explains that the young Vasari attracted Cardinal Silvio Passerini’s attention by reciting a portion of the *Aeneid* before the cardinal and his guests. Therefore, from a very young age, Vasari understood the benefit and necessity of an education and well-bred manner to an ambitious young man. As Rubin writes: “The mastery of acceptable manners and modes of behavior was his introduction to the company of the cultured (persone letterate) and the ruling elite upon whom he depended […] It was by exploiting his command of those governing norms that Vasari achieved such remarkable mobility in his society.”

It was also through his successful manipulation of the system of patronage that he gained access to Cardinal Alessandro Farnese’s court and received the commission for the Sala dei Cento Giorni. In fact, most, if not all, of his commissions were obtained through networking. One introduction led to another and slowly Vasari moved from the support of a banker, to the support of a cardinal, the pope, a duke, and finally a grand-duke.

Artistic success depended on an extended social network. On this point, Vasari’s success and exceptional hard work distinguish him from his contemporaries. While his artistic talent may never have matched his work ethic, he was above all else a reliable court

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68 “Patronage” had two meanings in sixteenth-century Italian: “The sixteenth-century Italian would have distinguished two separate activities, which are lumped together in the English term ‘patronage’: one, ‘clientelismo’, described the promotion of the client (artist, humanist, etc); the other, ‘mecenatismo’, derived from Cilnius Maecenas, and referred solely to the act of ordering a work of art and paying for it”. Clare Robertson, *Il Gran Cardinale*: Alessandro Farnese, Patron of the Arts (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 5.

69 Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 70.

70 Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 52.
artist, often valuing productivity over artistic genius and always laboring tirelessly to meet the demands of his patrons.

The example of his work for Cardinal Farnese is representative of his diligence. In his account of the conception of the Lives, Vasari portrays himself as an established member of the cardinal’s court. Dining with the cardinal and participating in the evening’s conversation, he was not simply a hired hand or contract laborer; he was one of the court’s personae letterate. He stood on equal footing with the court’s humanists, among them Annibale Caro and Paolo Giovo, and the cardinal treated him with deference. But, he was also eager to please his patron. The tone of respect and humility with which he addressed the cardinal was required of courtiers; however, his exhausting efforts in the Sala dei Cento Giorni were exceptional. He received the commission and with it the request that it be completed quickly. The cardinal desired that the fresco cycle be completed before his return to Rome from Germany. Frantically, Vasari organized a team of assistants, moved into the audience hall, and finished the cycle in one hundred days. The effort is reminiscent of his boastful assertion in the Preface to the Third Part: “whereas those early masters took six years to paint one panel, our modern masters can paint six in one year, as I can testify with the greatest confidence both from seeing and from doing”71. Speed and facility came with diligent study and practice. According to Vasari, Leonardo achieved his success through the study of nature, and Raphael assimilated the best qualities of the old masters in his graceful manner through study. But while diligence formed the foundation of artistic production in Vasari’s analysis, the goal and aim of these labors was always to achieve facility. After all, Michelangelo by whom he judged all art had realized “a greater depth and solidity, a grace more

71 Vasari, Lives, 225.
completely graceful, and a much more absolute perfection, accomplished with a manner so facile in the overcoming of difficulties, that it is not possible ever to see anything better”72. Diligence as a means to facility was an essential quality of a successful artist courtier. With good manners, an easy *maniera*, and a strong work ethic, the artist could rise from craftsman to courtier and carry with him his work from craft to liberal art.

In addition to using the existing system of patronage to his advantage, Vasari associated himself with the great artists of the time by interjecting his presence into their biographies, most notably the life of Michelangelo. To the modern reader, this is an embarrassing example of name-dropping. While one cannot argue that this did not in part motivate him, the practice served a more acceptable purpose. As Joan Stack argues, “Vasari celebrates individual artists as part of an historic brotherhood”73. He sees in the friendships among artists a supportive and beneficial network in which technical difficulties are hammered out and theoretical issues resolved. Artist friends are tutors, and he had the best tutor of all, Michelangelo. One example serves to demonstrate Vasari’s self-imposition in the life of Michelangelo. Refuting accusations of misrepresentation in the first edition of the *Lives*, he references documents pertaining to Michelangelo’s apprenticeship and writes:

> These entries I have copied from the book itself, in order to prove that all that was written at that time, as well as all that is about to be written is the truth; nor do I know that anyone has been more associated with [Michelangelo] than I have been, or has been a more faithful friend and servant to him, as can be proved even to one who knows not the facts, neither do I believe that there is anyone who can show a greater number of letters written by his own hand, or any written with greater affection than he has expressed to me74.

Certainly, he cannot be called dispassionate; the addition of his presence into the life of Michelangelo is self-serving. One should not overlook the fact that after Michelangelo’s death in 1564, Vasari’s presence increases tremendously in the 1568 edition, when the High Renaissance master could no longer refute the author’s claims. However, it also lends legitimacy to his claim of authority in matters of art and functions as a means of networking. By associating himself with the ruling elite and the greatest artists, adopting their manners and claiming their friendships, he gained recognition and respect for himself and his art and defined the artist as a courtier, a man of society. He associated himself with “the powerful and the great” and became powerful and great through the association.

Vasari’s most effective application of self-fashioning for the artist derives from his use of historical biography. As many scholars have noted, Vasari works from the long tradition of the lives of famous men, translating the genre and fitting it to the lives of famous artists75. Rubin explains that he relied on three significant precedents: Pliny the Elder’s *The Natural History*, the writings of Cicero, and Ghiberti’s *Commentaries*. From Pliny, he took the idea of literature as a guarantor of immortality and the concept of progression (or the cycle of perfection) in the development of style. From Cicero, he accepted history as a literary form, meaning it was not to him a simple, objective recount of facts. From Ghiberti, he took the application of the genre to artists but expanded it76.

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76 Rubin, “Vasari and the ‘Writers of Histories,’” Chap. 4 in *Giorgio Vasari*. 
In addition, he carefully followed the structure of the oratory of praise77. Each life begins with an introduction. In the life of Michelangelo, he starts with the artist’s perfection and God’s kindness in giving him as a citizen to Florence. The artist’s ancestry, birth, and youth follow. Vasari relates questionable evidence of Michelangelo’s noble ancestry, attributes his skill to the air of the quarry of the village in which his wet nurse lived, and describes the school in the Medici Garden and the patronage of Lorenzo de’ Medici. A long list of the artist’s pursuits in life follows, including his masterworks. The Pietà established his reputation. The David was perfection. The Battle of Cascina served as a model to every artist who was fortunate enough to see it, and so on. Comparisons are made to other artists. Finally, he concludes. In this life and the Lives as a whole, he made no claim to objectivity. In fact, there seems to be no demand for objectivity in historical biography in this period or in antiquity; instead, he introduced criticism into historical biography by attempting to write with judgment, instructing the reader and commemorating the artist. Most successfully, as Rubin explains: “By translating the events and consequences of political histories to modes and manners, he made artists into protagonists worthy of imitation, and united the study of character and particular talent (ingegno) to style”78. The artist became the modern hero and role model “saved from death” by the Lives79. Equated through Vasari’s literary style with the great men of antiquity, Michelangelo is more than the standard of artistic perfection; he is also the standard of character. The reader learns from his life the nature of noble character and the true excellent craftsmen. To Vasari, the ideal artist was a master and model of maniera in all its forms. He embodied the perfection of style, or maniera, in his art, and

77 As noted by Rubin, see Rubin, Giorgio Vasari, 158.
78 Rubin, Giorgio Vasari, 154.
79 See Stack, “Artists into heroes”.
the perfection of character in his virtuous behavior and graceful manner, again *maniera*.

As master and model, he shaped his persona to join the ranks of history’s greatest men. In short, the application of the genre to modern artists served in his never-ending quest to raise the status of artists, defining for them, and him, a new identity.

Consistently, Vasari used history as a mirror of human life. Rubin quotes Plutarch in saying, “using history as a mirror and endeavoring in a manner to fashion and adorn my life in conformity with the virtues therein depicted”\(^80\). Gazing into the past, Vasari saw the virtuous acts of Italy’s greatest painters as a model for himself and his reader. Therefore, the *Lives* are instructional examples for the reader and the author.

Prudence was the key to unlocking history’s mirror: “Prudence was understood as the practical knowledge of things to be sought for and to be avoided, the right reason required for making choices about actions. In its classical formulation prudence had three parts: the memory of the past, the knowledge of the present, and provision for the future”\(^81\). In his house in Arezzo, Vasari emphasized Labor, Plenty, Justice, Honor, Happiness or Concord, Wisdom, Charity, Liberality, Immortality, and Prudence\(^82\). One finds these virtues also in the *Lives*. But, what one finds most appealing in Vasari’s character is his determination to judge the work and character of others by this standard and also to fashion his own identity to this ideal. Due perhaps to his more limited artistic skill in comparison to the artistic genius that he recognized in Michelangelo, he valued diligence above all else. In all sincerity, he believed in man’s ability to pursue and achieve perfection with enough study, practice, and imitation. Honing his artistic skill

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\(^80\) Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 153.
\(^81\) Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari*, 154-55.
and shaping his character, he believed he could approach perfection. This belief in perfectibility is his greatest charm.

Vasari’s efforts at self-fashioning as a means of social advancement reached their pinnacle in 1554 when he entered the service of Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici. For many years, he had moved comfortably and successfully within the system of patronage, but he reached the veritable and lucrative status of court artist only after his integration into the duke’s household. As Reinhardt notes: “The most immediate and obvious sign of an artist’s ‘incorporation’ into the system was their direct belonging to a particular household, and being in receipt of a salary from the patron”83. Vasari enjoyed a similar position in the Medici court in his youth, but the political instability after Duke Alessandro de’ Medici’s assassination forced him to seek new patrons. For nearly seventeen years, he worked exhaustively to gain introductions to patrons and earn commissions, as most artists were forced to do in the period. While he had been welcomed into the Farnese court, he was never fully integrated into the cardinal’s household. Similarly, Altoviti was a dependable patron, but Vasari never entered his household. Finally, having entered the duke’s service and household, the artist could rest in the security and reliability of full integration. Until his death in 1574, the duke and then his son paid him a yearly salary of 150-300 ducats, consigned numerous artistic projects to him, and relied on him as an adviser84. At last, he had reached the status of the artist courtier, enjoying the respect and financial support of one of Italy’s greatest patrons.

84 Rubin, Giorgio Vasari, 14;16.
Vasari and Cosimo’s successful collaboration rested in the pursuit of self-fashioning. Cosimo became Duke of Florence in 1537 following Alessandro’s death, and in 1569 he became the first Grand Duke of Tuscany. Due to the political uncertainty surrounding his appointment to the duchy of Florence and the wholly unprecedented grand duchy, he recognized the necessity and delicacy of the construction of his public identity, what Bram Kempers calls “legend-making” and “image-building”\textsuperscript{85}. The complex task fell largely to Vasari. As Rubin describes his responsibilities: “He had become a form of artistic impresario, the versatile co-ordinator of ducal, then grandducal, enterprises where artistic and political vision were combined to express the glory of the Tuscan state ruled by Cosimo de’ Medici”\textsuperscript{86}. He was in many ways the court’s propagandist.

He focused his efforts at the duke’s court on two fronts. First, in the 1568 edition of the\textit{Lives}, his writing took on a noticeably pro-Medici tone. In the work’s dedication to Cosimo in 1550, Vasari writes: “in your most blessed house the arts were born anew”\textsuperscript{87}. In the 1568 dedication the tone is more personal, reflecting the author’s increasing intimacy with the Medici court: “For not only was it your help and favor that [the \textit{Lives}] first came to the light, as now they do again, but you are, in imitation of your ancestors, sole father, sole lord, and sole protector of these our arts”\textsuperscript{88}. Changes made to specific lives underscore his Medicean tone, and as Rubin writes: “he was able to produce a history of the cultural achievements of Cosimo’s court”\textsuperscript{89}. The achievements

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\textsuperscript{86}Rubin, \textit{Giorgio Vasari}, 199.
\textsuperscript{87}Vasari, \textit{Lives}, xxix.
\textsuperscript{88}Vasari, \textit{Lives}, xxvi.
\textsuperscript{89}Rubin, \textit{Giorgio Vasari}, 200.
in art of the preceding three centuries became the legacy of Tuscany, the Medici, and
most significantly Cosimo. Second, the duke’s self-fashioning guided Vasari’s extensive
work in the Palazzo Vecchio and elsewhere in Florence. The artist’s work for the Duke
began in 1555 with the decoration of the Quarter of Elements. Between 1556 and 1562,
he painted the Quarter of Leo X, designing a program that related the glorious history of
the Medici family and glorified its patron through his family’s history. Similarly
motivated and preceding the Quarter of Leo X, the room’s counterpart in Rome, the Sala
dei Cento Giorni, honed the artist’s skills in crafting propagandistic iconography. In both
rooms, familial glorifications veiled self-aggrandizement. Rubin explains: “Cosimo
appropriated the glories of the entire house of Medici and turned Florentine history into a
celebration of Medici rule”90. Other works followed in quick succession: the offices of
the Magistrates, the quarters of the duke and duchess, the palace’s grand staircase, and in
1563 the Salone dei Cinquecento, or Sala Grande91.

The artist’s and patron’s collaboration reached an apex of self-fashioning in the
Sala dei Cinquecento. Quite literally, the program transformed Florence’s republic into
Cosimo’s duchy, marking his court as one of Europe’s grandest and him as the proud
ruler of Tuscany. The central image, the \textit{Apotheosis of Cosimo I de’ Medici}, leaves little
doubt as to the patron’s willed and fashioned public identity and social position.
Florence crowns the duke, who is surrounded by cherubs representing various orders,
guilds and regions under the duke’s dominion. As Kempers notes, it is an image of “the

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\item[90] Rubin, \textit{Giorgio Vasari}, 200.
\item[91] For descriptions of these programs, see Boase, \textit{Giorgio Vasari}; Rubin, \textit{Giorgio Vasari}; Gian Carlo
Garfagnini and Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento, \textit{Giorgio Vasari: Tra Decorazione Ambientale e
\end{itemize}
duke in triumph as the prince of Florence." In this and all the works he commissioned from Vasari, the duke pursued a persistent system of self-aggrandizement, seeking to legitimize his rule and glorify his family through artistic patronage. Kempers writes: “the duke placed himself squarely in the line of an awe-inspiring dynasty […] patronage came to symbolize dominion.” Vasari endowed the duke’s self-fashioning with elegant and abundant visual expression in the hall and throughout Florence.

Vasari’s personal and professional self-fashioning was not neglected in this period. In 1563 he convinced Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici to support the institution of the Accademia del Disegno. As he had in the Lives and in fashioning his own identity, he worked to refashion the professional identity of all artists. Like the Lives, the academy was instructional and commemorative. It elected master artists who regularly visited the workshops in which the academy’s young artists were apprenticed in order to offer guidance and instruction. After proving proficiency, the young artists could be invited to join the academy. The academy also organized the burial of its members. Vasari’s lengthy description of Michelangelo’s burial demonstrates the importance of this function. As the life of Michelangelo suggests, Vasari understood the need of a supportive network for artists, and the academy was his practical solution. It was also the embodiment of his ambitions for artists.

92 Kempers, Painting, Power, and Patronage, 279.
93 Kempers, Painting, Power, and Patronage, 277.
94 Carl Goldstein insists that the academy was not, however, like its later manifestations. There was no defined system of instruction and no theoretical program. He posits that Michelangelo’s influence was a deciding factor in this characteristic. He writes, “He did not attempt to develop a true pedagogical program, however, because explicit and systematic measures would have conflicted with his own appreciation, which was surely based on Michelangelo’s theory and practice, of the importance of artistic freedom and of a genius that cannot be acquired in school”; Carl Goldstein, “Vasari and the Florentine Accademia del Disegno,” Zeitschrift Fur Kunstgeschichte 38, no. 2 (1975),152.
The academy’s name betrays Vasari’s professional intentions. As Carl Goldstein summarized his motivations: “It was his aim to secure a new and higher social status for artists by replacing the old craft guilds with a prestigious academy”95. Traditionally, academies were organizations of *personae letterate*: “a true academy, as the term was understood, was a group or organization dedicated to the discussion of such subjects as philosophy, poetry, and philology, liberal or intellectual subjects whereas the visual arts were regarded as applied disciplines”96. Painting, sculpture, and architecture had long been discredited as manual, rather than intellectual, labors. Recognizing the disparity among the arts, Vasari gave his career and the academy to redefining the artist’s position. As Kempers writes: “individual efforts towards social advancement joined in a collective effort to reorganize the profession” with Vasari leading the way97. Vasari’s emphasis on *disegno* in the academy’s name served two purposes. In the first, it resolved the endless debate as to the superiority of painting or sculpture, arguing that *disegno* was the father of both: “It was a concept that not only blurred the once sharply defined distinctions between the three forms of art, but also brought patrons, advisers and artists closer together”98. With the tension between the arts resolved, artists enjoyed an artistic brotherhood in which painters and sculptors benefited. In the second, it emphasized the conceptual origins of art. In Vasari’s mind, master artists were not craftsmen, although certainly they had practiced and perfected a craft. Instead, they were intellectuals. The genius of their work stemmed from *disegno*, or the conceptual and intellectual. The name suggested “an abstract concept of art,” and as Kempers makes clear: “Theory and

95 Goldstein, “Vasari and the Accademia,” 152.
96 Goldstein, “Vasari and the Accademia,” 147.
historical knowledge were now of the essence, and craftsmanship consigned to the limited realm of the workshop. In this way, Vasari equated artists with the *personae letterate*. By equating the artist with the academician, Vasari refashioned the artist’s identity, raising his status and earning his craft a position among the liberal arts.

Vasari was a master of self-fashioning and a true friend of the arts. Like many artists of his time, he rose from humble origins to the lavish courts of Italy’s greatest patrons through hard work and a carefully constructed, graceful, and courtly *maniera*. Because Italian courts required a refined and sophisticated mode of behavior, *maniera* was the artist’s introduction into a society in which courtly existence was: “a way of life so stylized and cultured that it was, in effect, a work of art itself.” In his book and all his labors, Vasari defined himself as a virtuous courtier and academician, a man of letters and sophistication. Association with the great patrons of the period like Cardinal Farnese, culminating in his integration into the Medici court, was his personal success; however, Vasari sought more than personal advancement. He desired to raise the status of the artist and art with him. The artist’s status had been changing since the fifteenth century, most noticeably in the successes of Michelangelo and Raphael. Vasari’s *Lives*, his professional success, and the Accademia del Disegno solidified and publicized the transition. His efforts transformed the artist into a hero, a model, and a man worthy of history’s attention. To many readers, his belief in perfectibility seems naïve; yet, his life exemplifies the humanist ideal. Even a potter’s grandson from Arezzo could, with enough dedication and style, rise to society’s heights, carrying his craft with him.

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III. Farnese Patronage and Self-fashioning

Cardinal Alessandro Farnese and his grandfather, Pope Paul III, understood artistic patronage as a public act of self-definition, a means of self-fashioning. Like many before them, they patronized the arts in order to glorify their family and justify their social standing. While remarkable, their nascent rise to power left much for the family to excuse and validate. Throughout his pontificate, Paul III pursued political alliances, land, and lucrative appointments for his family. He also commissioned grandiose works of art that declared the force and dominion of the papacy, and through it, the power and influence of his family. His efforts are infamous, marking him as one of history’s most successful, and at times most shameful, nepotists. Since nepotism was fundamentally against Church doctrine, it necessitated very delicate maneuvering and, above all, a steady program of self-validating artistic patronage. While many factors motivated the sixteenth-century patron—such as aesthetic appreciation, the desire to collect items as status symbols, and a sense of duty or political necessity—magnificence dominated. Using Peter Burke’s definition, magnificence may be understood as “the outward sign of magnanimity” or “greatness of spirit” which manifested itself in Rome as “conspicuous consumption”. As he writes: “The function of such consumption was to distinguish a given individual or family from others, whether equals (therefore rivals), or social inferiors […] At the same time, this kind of behavior was informally compulsory for any family which aspired to be accepted by and incorporated into the nobility”. Thus,

101 Robertson’s *Il Gran Cardinale* is the best source for an historical overview of the Farnese family and their patronage.
103 Burke, *Early Modern Italy*, 134.
104 Burke, *Early Modern Italy*, 134-5.
conforming to society’s expectations, Alessandro followed his grandfather in defining
himself and his family as sophisticated, learned, magnanimous, and deserving members
of Rome’s ruling elite through the artistic projects that he commissioned. Although many
of the cardinal’s commissions exemplify “conspicuous consumption,” or the public
fashioning of identity, this paper concerns the artist-patron relationship between Vasari
and Alessandro. Vasari’s Justice and the Sala dei Cento Giorni for the cardinal represent
unique instances in which the patron’s and artist’s self-fashionings coalesced. After
briefly outlining Farnese history and patronage, this chapter will focus on the artist’s
work for Alessandro and its use of what is now called the “Mannerist” style to define the
public personae of the patron and artist105.

As compared to Rome’s baronial families, the Farnese hailed from humble
origins, and like Vasari, their modest background motivated and necessitated self-
fashioning. Within the flexibility of Roman society, the necessity to legitimize one’s new
social standing constrained those who rose within the social hierarchy. In the fourteenth
century, the Farnese served the papacy as condottieri. Alessandro’s great-great-
grandfather, Ranuccio Farnese, rose to the position of senator and papal gonfalone as a
condottiero. And for his services, he amassed grants of land in Lazio; but despite his
success, his family did not truly enter Roman society until Ranuccio’s son, Pier Luigi,
made into the Caetani family, one of Rome’s baronial families. In 1468, Alessandro
Farnese senior, the future Pope Paul III, was born to Pier Luigi and his wife, Giovanna
Caetani. Having received his education in Rome and Florence and attracted the attention
of influential patrons, Alessandro senior rose quickly through the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

105 As noted in the introduction to this paper, Mannerism raises difficulties when used as a period label. However, it is well established as the period’s label and derives from the sixteenth-century maniera; therefore, it will be used in reference to the period and the style of its artists in this chapter.
In 1493, he was awarded the cardinal’s hat, and in 1534 he reached the pinnacle of Roman society when he became pope, taking the name Paul III. After rising to St. Peter’s throne, he pursued politically strategic marriages and lucrative appointments for his sons and grandsons. In very little time, his program of nepotism surpassed all precedents.

Under Paul III, the family followed a well-established path to legitimization through political alliances and appointments. First, the pope negotiated marriages for his grandsons into Europe’s royal families. In 1538 he orchestrated the marriage of Ottavio to Margaret of Austria, the illegitimate daughter of Charles V. In 1552, Orazio married Diane de Valois, the illegitimate daughter of Henri II of France, again at Paul III’s instigation. Second, he organized land acquisitions that brought advantageous appointments and political power with them. He created the Duchy of Castro for his son, Pier Luigi, in 1537, and seven years later, in perhaps an exceptional example of dynasty building, he formed the Duchy of Parma and Piacenza, after very risky political maneuvering. Third, he brought members of his family into the Sacred College. He made two of his grandsons cardinals, Alessandro in 1534 and Ranuccio in 1545. Alessandro was only fourteen years old when Paul III made him a cardinal. In the years that followed, his grandfather showered him with benefices. During his lifetime, Alessandro held thirteen bishoprics and sixty-four lesser benefices. He was Archpriest of S. Maria Maggiore, Archpriest of St. Peter’s, First Cardinal Priest, Dean of the Sacred College, and protector of numerous religious orders and confraternities. Most importantly in 1535, the pope appointed him Vice-Chancellor of the Roman Church. As

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106 For an overview of Farnese family history, see Robertson, *Il Gran Cardinale*, 7-14.
Vice-Chancellor, a lifelong position, he received the Palazzo della Cancelleria as his primary residence, a sizeable fortune, and the responsibilities of issuing papal briefs, disposing of the Church’s material benefits, and communicating to the public for the pope. In the end, he earned nearly 120,000 scudi a year, at a time when 6,000 scudi was the minimum at which a cardinal could maintain a respectable household\textsuperscript{108}. At Robertson’s estimation, his yearly earnings were approximately 8.5 to 11.5 percent of the papacy’s disposable income\textsuperscript{109}. As the primary beneficiary of Paul III’s generosity, Alessandro enjoyed a very luxurious life, but familial advancement created its own set of problems.

Artistic patronage was the surest means of masking the family’s self-interest. As Reinhardt has noted, patronage disguised and validated nepotism\textsuperscript{110}. In the first, patrons pursued charitable works, for example the sponsorship of a religious order. These commissions justified “the status of the privileged through service and good works” and defined the patrons as men of “pious, charitable and, above all unselfish acts”\textsuperscript{111}. In the second, magnificence justified opulent and self-interested commissions and asserted the patron’s sophistication, learnedness, and magnanimity. Most often these commissions announced the arrival of a new family power. Through “the status symbols of grand proportions of the old aristocracy,” families like the Farnese declared their new but well-deserved position in Roman society\textsuperscript{112}.

\textsuperscript{109} Robertson, \textit{Il Gran Cardinale}, 11.
\textsuperscript{110} Reinhardt, “Roman Art Market.”
\textsuperscript{111} Reinhardt, “Roman Art Market,” 84.
\textsuperscript{112} Reinhardt, “Roman Art Market,” 85.
Farnese patronage reads like a textbook example of patronage as familial definition and validation. As a cardinal Paul III had begun construction on the family palace, Palazzo Farnese. When he became pope, he enlarged the project, envisioning a grandiose palace that would monumentally assert the Farnese presence in Rome. He defined *villeggiatura*, or “the practice of withdrawing to the country in the summer months to escape the heat and risk of disease in the city,” and completely revitalized Frascati in the process. He focused papal funds on the reconstruction of St. Peter’s, Michelangelo’s Campidoglio and *Last Judgment*, the Scala Regia and Sala Regia, the Cappella Paolina, and the restoration of Castel Sant’Angelo. While these architectural projects participated in the larger renovation of the city after the Sack of Rome in 1527, Paul III manipulated the public’s perception of his papacy as a new Golden Age in order to assert not only the power and authority of the papacy but the influence and importance of the Farnese family. Furthermore, the family collected antique sculpture and decorative objects, relating themselves to the ancient glory of Rome and implying its continuance in Paul III’s Golden Age. They sponsored intellectual projects and commissioned works of art, most significantly grand fresco cycles that related the family’s history and prestige and marked them as among the learned elite. Consistently, the desire and need to fashion themselves in accordance with Rome’s expectations motivated the Farnese and defined the nature of their patronage.

Like his grandfather, Alessandro used artistic patronage as a means of self-fashioning, and he was ready and equipped to bend his artistic taste to political pressure and current fashion. Spanning nearly fifty years, his career as a patron of the arts was extensive and varied. Burdened with the costs of the Palazzo Farnese, he significantly

limited his artistic patronage until 1546 when Paul III began to absorb more of the palace’s costs. Before 1546, he patronized the decorative arts, commissioning the Farnese Hours from Giulio Clovio and the Farnese Casket from Giovanni Bernardi and Manno Sbarri. The iconography of both works is remarkably complex. Clovio’s Farnese Hours uses a sophisticated form of typology which relates biblical themes to ancient, pagan themes in order to: “expand and to test the cardinal’s memory, functioning as both a theological and artistic primer”\textsuperscript{114}. Similarly, the Farnese Casket employs an intricate iconography which relates the engraved scenes to the sculpted figures, forming a cohesive but erudite whole. Both artists also filled the visual language with sophisticated references to past artistic styles which require a knowledgeable viewer to recognize. In their complexity, these early commissions demonstrate a taste for abstruse and opulent works of art, a taste which was to reoccur through much of Alessandro’s career as a patron.

His first commission for a painting occurred in 1543 when he commissioned Vasari to paint a figure of Justice. Paolo Giovio had recommended Vasari to Alessandro; and while his adviser’s recommendation certainly influenced his decision, it is unsurprising that he chose Vasari given his taste for ornate and complex works. Praised by Giovio as “an efficient, expeditious, handy and resolute painter”, Vasari was also a man of sophisticated \textit{maniera}, both in his deportment and artistic style as the last chapter noted\textsuperscript{115}. One can only assume that the painting and Vasari pleased the cardinal, for in 1546 he commissioned Vasari to paint the Cancelleria’s main audience hall. His taste for


\textsuperscript{115} Robertson, \textit{Il Gran Cardinal}, 55.
painters of *maniera* repeated itself two years later when he commissioned Francesco Salviati to fresco the Cappella del Pallio in the Cancelleria. Again, the artist earned the commission through the recommendation of one of the cardinal’s advisers, this time Annibal Caro.

Alessandro’s early taste for the *maniera* exemplifies the extravagant, recondite, and courtly environment in which Vasari and other Mannerists thrived. As Elena Calvillo notes, a “figural language and ornate style” developed in the cardinal’s court. Scholars have disagreed as to the cardinal’s degree of control over the development and utilization of the style. Some scholars have attributed its development to the taste and influence of Alessandro’s advisers. As Robertson notes, Paolo Giovio and Annibal Caro consistently demonstrated a taste, within their own intellectual projects and recommendations to the cardinal, for literary and overly sophisticated works. Certainly, artists gained commissions through the introductions of these advisers. However, the brotherhood of artists that Vasari implies in his friendship with Michelangelo suggests that the style arose when artists lived and worked at the same court. The Farnese employed distinctly Mannerist artists, like Perino del Vaga, Vasari, Salviati, and Giulio Clovio. With access to the one another’s preparatory drawings and completed works, and with the importance given to the imitation of *maniera*, it is quite probable that the distinct form of Mannerism at the Farnese court developed through the cross-fertilization of these artists’ styles. It is also possible that Alessandro frequented these artists for his own aesthetic tastes, as Cavillo argues. Frequently commissioning works from Mannerist artists, Alessandro must have appreciated the style to some degree. If nothing else, he

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116 Calvillo, “Il Gran Miniatore,” 166.
recognized it as the current vogue and thus a sign of sophistication in Roman society. Regardless of the degree to which the cardinal encouraged or appreciated this style, one point remains: within the cardinal’s court, a specific, courtly style developed and was utilized by most, if not all, of the artists that he patronized. Mannerism flourished at Alessandro’s court before 1550.

Giulio Clovio and Francesco Salviati stand out among the Mannerist artists at his court. Defined by the imitation of the High Renaissance maniera, their works represent the highly artificial style common to the mid-century. To borrow Freedberg’s phrase, they see nature and art through the “screen” of the High Renaissance’s idealization. In Clovio’s Farnese Hours (Figure 7), one immediately sees Michelangelo’s influence. Taking his inspiration from the Sistine Ceiling, Clovio frames his central image with nude, monumental figures of insistent anatomical accuracy. Much as Michelangelo did in the Victory (Figure 8), he places his figures in highly artificial and posed postures, demonstrating the period’s transformation of classical contrapposto into the more exaggerated serpentine figure. In its classical manifestation, contrapposto denoted a shifting of weight that enlivened the figure and mimicked nature. Slowly, first with Leonardo’s Leda and later Michelangelo’s paintings and sculptures, the artists of the High Renaissance began to rotate the figure around its central axis, creating an S-like or flame-like figure\(^\text{119}\). Clovio and other sixteenth-century artists adopted Michelangelo’s exaggerated, serpentine form and viewed it as a form of variety and ornamentation, betraying their dependence on the style of High Renaissance masters.

\(^{119}\) For a discussion of the serpentine figure, see David Summers, “Maniera and Movement: The Figure Serpentinata,” in Readings in Italian Mannerism, ed. Liana Cheney, 273-313.
Imitation of Raphael’s style also characterized the period and was particularly common in Francesco Salviati’s work. Salviati’s fresco cycle in the Palazzo Farnese (Figure 9) demonstrates the influence of Raphael’s relief-like style with its flattened space and rhetorical gestures. Marcia Hall defines the relief-like style as the style existent in Rome from circa 1525 to 1550 and derived from Raphael, and she notes its spatial compression, self-conscious and graceful postures, flat light, and marble-like tones. One readily notes these qualities in Salviati’s work. He tilts the distant space towards the foreground, poses the primary figures at the left in artificial postures that symbolize friendship and accord, and paints the whole image in flat, marble-like colors. Salviati’s Bathsheba Going to David from the Palazzo Sacchetti (Figure 10) is especially instructive because it demonstrates the similarities of style between his and Vasari’s oeuvre that resulted from their close friendship. The artist limits his palette and elegantly poses the figure of Bathsheba at the base of the stairway, suggesting Leonardo’s Leda in its serpentine figure. He distorts spatial recession and collapses temporal reality into a single, compressed space. The narrative is almost cinematographic, to borrow a modern word, as if photographic stills of the same action have been overlaid in a halting narrative. Taken from the High Renaissance style, Clovio’s and Salviati’s styles are crafted and markedly artificial. A palpable self-consciousness pervaded the art at Alessandro’s court, in much the same way as it defined the identities of the court’s members.

After 1550, Alessandro became more conservative in his artistic commissions. In these years, he turned his attention to the Villa Farnese at Caprarola. Like his grandfather, he enjoyed villeggiatura and redefined a city’s landscape to facilitate his

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plans. Begun in 1558, the elaborate project took some twenty years to reach completion.

Jacopo Vignola worked as architect, and the Zuccaro brothers designed and completed much of the interior decoration\textsuperscript{121}. The Zuccari decorations are more diagrammatic, conservative, and mimetic of the \textit{all’antica} style than the works previously discussed\textsuperscript{122}. They may be read as signs of his changing artistic taste. Due to the growing pressure on cardinals after the Council of Trent or perhaps a personal spiritual revitalization, Alessandro, who was finally ordained in 1564, became increasingly pious in his later years. His piety affected his patronage\textsuperscript{123}. Involved with the Jesuit order in his later years, he commissioned Vignola to draft the plans of Il Gesù in 1568. While the church was built according to Vignola’s plans, he commissioned Giacomo della Porta to design the façade. The choice represents his growing “taste for simplicity” and “Jesuit influence,” as Robertson notes, and a marked change in his artistic patronage\textsuperscript{124}. At the end of his life, perhaps weary of the demands of Roman society, he retired to Caprarola and spent much of his time in meditation. In 1589, he died. Throughout his career, he viewed patronage as a public act driven by the need to fashion the family’s identity and assert his place in society’s upper echelons, and he changed his artistic taste to match Rome’s changing atmosphere.


\textsuperscript{122} See especially Robertson, \textit{Il Gran Cardinale}, 74-130.

\textsuperscript{123} Robertson, “Alessandro and the Art of the Counter-Reformation,” chap. 4 in \textit{Il Gran Cardinale}, 149-207.

\textsuperscript{124} Robertson, \textit{Il Gran Cardinale}, 194.
Motivated by self-fashioning in their endeavors, although never referring to it as such, Alessandro and Vasari were ideally matched in their artist-patron relationship. Vasari’s Justice (Figure 11) illustrates the sophisticated imagery toward which both gravitated and which would characterize the products of their professional relationship. The author of the painting’s iconography is unknown, but it was likely Vasari, Giovio, or the two working in tandem. Without a surviving explanatory text, the complex iconography is difficult, and at times impossible, to decipher. Commonly called Justice, the central figure represents Astraea, an obscure and ancient figure associated with justice whom Paul III had incorporated into his imprese. Bernice Davidson explains the figure’s significance: “[Astraea was associated with] the ever-verdant dream of the revival of the Golden Age of Augustus, which saw the birth of the Savior and prophesied Astraea’s return to earth bringing justice, peace, and piety”125. Incorporated into Farnese imagery, Astraea carried with her the suggestion of Paul III’s Golden Age. In Vasari’s painting, she sits enthroned with an ostrich at her side, identified as a symbol of justice’s invincibility. In her right hand, she holds an Egyptian scepter. At her left, Time, who reveals all things, presents Virtue whom she crowns with oak leaves126. More commonly, seven female personifications represent the three Christian virtues and four pagan virtues. Here the one figure of Virtue represents faith, hope, charity, justice, prudence, fortitude, and temperance simultaneously. Furthermore, holding two doves Virtue recalls images in which Justice embraces Peace; therefore, Virtue may also symbolize peace. Finally,

125 Bernice Davidson, “Pope Paul III’s Additions to Raphael’s Logge: His Imprese in the Logge,” The Art Bulletin 61, no. 3 (Sep., 1979), 403-404.
126 Robertson, Il Gran Cardinale, 55-7.
Justice is occasionally shown rescuing Innocence from vice\textsuperscript{127}. Virtue’s sweet and naïve gaze may certainly be read as innocence. Therefore, the single figure of Virtue represents the seven virtues, peace, and innocence, a multivalent reading commonly noted in Mannerist works.

At Astraea’s feet, seven vices cower, chained to her waste. In the foreground, Envy, an old and ugly woman with sagging breasts, shields her face from the viewer. To her right, an old man with his hands chained behind his back and a heavy satchel over his shoulders leans greedily towards a pile of valuable objects in the immediate foreground. Carrying the traditional attribute of Avarice, the viewer reads his longing gaze as a sign of his consuming greed for wealth and power as represented by the coins, crown, and scepter toward which he gazes. Next to him a female figure kneels with a donkey’s head at her side. The uncommon attribute is troublesome. During the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Lust transformed into Love or Venus who was occasionally accompanied by a he-goat\textsuperscript{128}. The bizarre substitution of a donkey for the he-goat may be an \textit{invenzione} of Vasari’s or may suggest an alternative reading. The remaining figures are similarly impossible to identify with certainty; however, the presence of two, or three, of the seven deadly sins suggests that the remaining figures represent Gluttony, Sloth, Anger, and Pride. In short, when read cohesively, the painting illustrates the Golden Age under Paul III in which Justice (here Astraea) saves Innocence (Virtue) from the vices, bringing Peace and Piety (again Virtue) into the world.

The painting’s complexity of iconography and style defines it as a court and Mannerist object. The three sources of artificiality that Barthes identified—rule-

\textsuperscript{128} Hall, \textit{Dictionary}, 196.
governed transpositions, impurity of style, and apprenticeship—are present, as they are in every image. Vasari worked within an artistic tradition, or set of rule-governed transpositions that had developed linear perspective, modeling, and the serpentine figure. These techniques formed the schema with which he transferred perception and imagination to the panel or wall, but unlike his predecessors he emphasized the resulting artificiality. He posed his figures elegantly but suspended them unnaturally in a scientifically rendered space. The plastic and monumental figures, derived from Michelangelo, enjoy a degree of invenzione in their costume and thematic relationships that was previously unseen and a stylization in their postures that exaggerates the master’s style. In short, Vasari worked from the tradition but experimented with it, creating a visually complex image for the sophisticated viewer who was aware of the previous century’s developments and suggesting his artistic awareness and skill.

Similarly, Vasari’s training, or his apprenticeship, is evident in the painting’s coloring. The bold and nearly iridescent palette betrays Andrea del Sarto’s influence, and the all’antica costumes suggest the sixteenth-century vogue for ancient groteschi and invenzione. Both are produced on the panel more for their variety and beauty—or their artifice—than natural or historical accuracy. Finally, the impurity of style is apparent. Composition requires a degree of selection which inevitably affects change in the artist’s perception of nature or maniera and creates a contrived, posed, and artificial work. Vasari recognized the composed nature of his work and highlighted it as a sign of his artistic virtuosity. To these three sources, this paper adds self-fashioning, and one can see the artist’s and patron’s efforts at self-fashioning in the painting’s iconographical complexity. It is not the didactic image of the previous century in which the iconography
is meant to be immediately legible. Instead, it must be contemplated and studied. As Marcia Hall writes: “the Maniera diversions are […] cryptic messages that, once deciphered, serve to reassure viewers of their exclusive membership in an elite cultural fellowship”\textsuperscript{129}. Only the learned members of Alessandro’s court could appreciate the obscure reference to Astraea or the multilayered persona of Virtue. In sum, the artificiality of the image’s iconography and style demands a learned viewer. With references to the High Renaissance, antiquity, and Christian iconography, the image declares itself, its patron, and its artist as members of Rome’s most discerning society.

As the main audience hall of the Cancelleria, the Sala dei Cento Giorni required a more readily comprehensible iconography. Vasari and Giovio designed the tight but complex iconographic scenes in order to glorify the Farnese family and highlight the public functions of the Cancelleria, but within the more readable histories, the *invenzione* and stylistness, which the sophisticated patron could enjoy, present themselves to the discerning eye. Vasari divided the room’s walls into three bands. In the central band, architectural niches flank historical scenes. Flesh-toned personifications stand in the architectural niches. In the lower band, fictive staircases lead into the historical scenes’ stage-like settings. In the upper band, personifications frame coats-of-arms, and painted busts crown the architectural niches (Figure 12). There are four principle scenes: *Peace of Nice*, *Paul III Distributing Benefices*, *Rebuilding of St. Peter’s*, and *Universal Homage to Paul III*. Combining allegorical, classical, and historical themes, the cycle enjoys rich visual imagery. But despite its disparate parts, the theme of papal virtue dominates. As Robertson writes: “The subjects for the history scenes were chosen to celebrate the ideal qualities for a pope to possess, and to illustrate how Paul III embodied them: he is thus

\textsuperscript{129} Hall, *After Raphael*, 146.
shown as the perfect lawgiver, peacemaker, patron of the arts and rewarder of service to the Church”\textsuperscript{130}. Through the pope’s virtues, the cycle highlights the glory, strength, and influence of the Farnese family, while the cycle’s sophisticated style underscores the Farnese’s position among the ruling and ecclesiastic elite.

Based on the historical truce between Charles V and Francis I in 1538, the Peace of Nice (Figure 13) represents Paul III as “peacemaker”. In the central scene, female personifications carry Paul III on a sedan chair above the celebrating crowd. Among the chair bearers, Robertson identifies Victory and Peace\textsuperscript{131}. Peace’s imagery and significance dominate the scene. Quoted from the Equestrian Monument of Marcus Aurelius, the pope’s gesture is an emblem of peace (and a subtle suggestion of Farnese patronage, for Paul III had recently commissioned Michelangelo to redesign the Campidoglio around the famous monument)\textsuperscript{132}. Concord stands in the architectural niche at the left. Below, an inscription reads: “[Concord] enlarges small things. [She] restores the insurmountable”\textsuperscript{133}. In the central scene in the left foreground, a grisaille Constancy chains Furor. Reconciled soldiers embrace in the foreground, and in the middle ground, the warring emperor and French king stand together. The Temple of Janus looms in the background. In ancient times, the temple’s gates were closed in times of peace; therefore, it is also a symbol of peace\textsuperscript{134}. At the base of the image, a painted plaque lauds Peace’s benefits: “The greatest honors are cultivated in peace. Abundance is brought to fruition and public and private works are enlarged.” As Ripa notes, abundance is

\textsuperscript{130} Robertson, \textit{Il Gran Cardinale}, 60.
\textsuperscript{131} Robertson, \textit{Il Gran Cardinale}, 65.
\textsuperscript{132} Robertson, \textit{Il Gran Cardinale}, 66-7.
\textsuperscript{133} Many thanks to my friends, Erin Galgay and Nicole Potdevin, who assisted me in the translation of the Latin inscriptions in the Sala dei Cento Giorni. These translations are intended as aides in reading the room’s visual iconography; and therefore, they are loosely translated.
\textsuperscript{134} Robertson, \textit{Il Gran Cardinale}, 66.
traditionally the result of peace. At the left, Love stands ready with bow and arrows, “for
universal peace and love between peoples consumes the evidence of hatred and
violence”\textsuperscript{135}. In the architectural niche at the right, Charity tends to her children. Her
inscription reads: “[Charity] shows the perfect specimen of Christian virtue”. Better
understood as love of God and ones neighbor, Charity with peace overcomes “hatred and
violence”. The painted busts in the upper band complete the image, referring to historical
figures associated with peace. Placed prominently above the crowd in the central scene,
Paul III commands the scene. With his forceful and powerful gesture, he also commands
peace; thus, Paul III heralds in Peace and her companions Constancy, Love, Charity, and
Abundance.

\textit{Paul III Distributing Benefices (Figure 14)} represents one of the primary
functions of the Cancelleria, disposing of the Church’s material benefices. Paul III sits
enthroned right of center. His old and world-weary appearance is reminiscent of Titian’s
\textit{Paul III without Cap}. Three semi-nude men humbly bow at the pope’s feet, and he
crowns one of them with a cardinal’s hat. Putti play at the pope’s side among the
accoutrements of papal benefices, including a bishop’s mitre, cardinal’s hat, and
overflowing gold coins. At the left, Virtue restrains Envy, who lounges on the fictive
stairway literally consuming the poisonous venom of her own jealousy as represented by
a snake\textsuperscript{136}. Labor stands at the far right. Together, Labor and Virtue represent the
qualities that Paul III rewards. In the background, the deserving stand, among them

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{136} As Ripa notes, she traditionally eats her own heart because: “Her eternal envy of others causes her heart eternal disquiet, and she literally consumes herself in the envy of others—in other words, she ‘eats her heart out’”. See Ripa, \textit{Pictorial Imagery}, 57. Vasari’s depiction of her then is an interesting variation of the more traditional image.
\end{footnotesize}
Michelangelo, Antonio da Sangallo, Cardinals Pole Sadoleto and Bembo, and Paolo Giovio\textsuperscript{137}. The Salomonic columns are taken from a design by Raphael\textsuperscript{138}. In the architectural niche at the left, an inscription accompanies Benevolence: “The growth of lively virtue throws open the door to benevolence.” Virtue then inspires and merits reward. At the left, Religion’s inscription reads: “Religion makes men near to gods”. With the inclusion of Michelangelo, whom Vasari called divine, the viewer understands that virtue and labor in the arts makes one divine. Finally, with Envy restrained one does not question the merit of those rewarded by the Church. At a time when the wealth of the Church and its privileged members was increasingly criticized, Vasari’s image asserted the authority of the Church and the excellence of its servants.

The third image in the cycle, Rebuilding of St. Peter’s (Figure 15), illustrates Paul III’s artistic patronage. In the background St. Peter’s, as it appeared in 1546, stands under construction. The reconstruction symbolized the revitalization of Rome after the disastrous sack in 1527. A monumental male nude reclines on the fictive stairway. Holding a papal tiara and baldacchino, he symbolizes the Vatican Hill. Together, he and the six putti that surround him represent the seven hills of Rome. At the left, Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, and Geometry present the plans of St. Peter’s to Paul III who wears the garb of a High Hebrew priest\textsuperscript{139}. The costume likely implies a sense of papal authority, an important point of emphasis as tension grew surrounding the Reformation\textsuperscript{140}. Magnificence stands at his back and subtly validates the monumentality of the architectural plans. As noted before, magnificence legitimized the papacy’s

\textsuperscript{137} Robertson, \emph{Il Gran Cardinale}, 65.
\textsuperscript{138} Robertson, \emph{Il Gran Cardinale}, 65.
\textsuperscript{139} Robertson, \emph{Il Gran Cardinale}, 62-3.
\textsuperscript{140} Robertson, \emph{Il Gran Cardinale}, 63.
incredible expenditures, painting it as a manifestation of papal magnanimity and charity. The image suggests the splendor of the architectural plans through the presence of Marcus Agrippa in the upper band. Responsible for the construction of the Pantheon, ancient Rome’s greatest surviving temple, his patronage prefigures Paul III’s plans for St. Peter’s, lending the new structure the authority of ancient Rome. The left portrait bust represents Numa Pompilius who introduced religion to Rome. Read together the image’s various parts suggest, as Robertson writes: “the enlightened piety and splendour of Paul’s patronage”.

The visual imagery reaches its apex in *Universal Homage to Paul III* (Figure 16), in which the far-reaching authority and influence of the Church is splendidly represented. The pope sits left of center. Alessandro stands behind him, resting his hand on Paul III’s throne as in Titian’s *Paul III with his Grandsons*. Distant and exotic nations come to pay homage to the illustrious pope. With them they bring strange gifts, including camels, an elephant, and a giraffe. They bow before him with grand and eloquent gestures. At the left, the Tiber sits on the stairway with Rome’s she-wolf at his feet and a cornucopia representing his plentitude hanging from his arm. Industry and Merit stand as statues at the sides. As in *Paul III Distributing Benefices*, the grisaille figures represent the virtues rewarded in the scene; however, in this scene, the virtues belong to Paul III and the Church. Above the painted busts depict Julius Caesar and Alexander the Great, suggesting the “vast geographical area over which the Church had its dominion”. Eloquence and Justice, two essential qualities at the Cancelleria where the pope’s decrees were issued, flank the central scene. Eloquence’s inscription reads: “Calm spirit

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142 Robertson, *Il Gran Cardinale*, 63.
summons and soothes angered men”, and Justice’s reads: “[Justice] guards and reconciles strength and faith with majesty and authority”. Ruling with justice, Paul III reconciles the conflicting demands of the many nations under his rule and merits the praise with which they shower him.

The Mannerist practice of quotation encapsulates the image’s artificiality of style. Underscoring the artist’s virtuosity, the aesthetic value of the work of art and the sophisticated and cultured natures of Vasari and Alessandro, the fresco cycle is remarkably artificial. In his criticism of the Second Age, Vasari expresses the traits desired in sixteenth-century art. He talks of freedom within the rule, invention, beauty in every detail, perfection of finish, sweet and facile grace, light and graceful figures, refined draftsmanship and judgment, abundance, and most importantly, “delicacy, refinement, and supreme grace, which are the qualities produced by the perfection of art in beautiful figures”144. He encourages the artist to create the most beautiful figures by combining the most beautiful parts, and while he encourages the study of nature, his art and his theory are based as well on the study of the maniera of past artists; thus, his figures are abstractions from art. They are imitations of imitations, twice removed from the “real” object and revealing the influence of rule-governed transpositions, the impurity of style, and the artist’s apprenticeship. In the hand of Vasari and other Mannerists, imitation readily becomes quotation. For the modern viewer, quotation is often troublesome because the modern perspective demands originality, but in the sixteenth century, quotation was acceptable and desirable. Identifying the quotation was an essential and enjoyable element of interpretation. It reflected the viewer’s sophistication in his knowledge of past works of art, and it reflected the stylized and artificial identities

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of courtiers and artist courtiers. The emphasized artificiality of the image—its derivative, affected, and aesthetic nature—was essential to the quotation.

Shearman summarizes the sentiments on imitation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, writing: “Imitation is a fruitful framework for creativity”\textsuperscript{145}. He identifies three types of quotation, or imitation\textsuperscript{146}. He calls the first “bearer of signification”. In this example, the identifiable figure carries its original meaning into the imitative work of art. In the second type of quotation, emulation denotes the work of art’s artistic lineage. The third type is quotation as a means of resolving visual difficulties, which most often takes the form of self-quotation. Each of these forms of quotation is present in Vasari’s fresco cycle, and each contributes to the image’s artifice and meaning.

Vasari’s use of the Equestrian Monument of Marcus Aurelius in \textit{Peace of Nice} exemplifies the first form of quotation. Associated with the ancient monument, the gesture carries the signification of universal peace into Vasari’s work; thus, it is a bearer of signification, not an empty figural quotation. Discussing Bronzino’s use of references, Brock writes: “Forms can certainly vehicle a meaning external to them, but fundamentally they have the power to carry, from one work to another, emotional and semantic charges that are inextricably tied to them and that are thus transferred from the work of one artist to that of another”\textsuperscript{147}. More profoundly he argues: “it allows innovation without breaking the continuity of tradition, original inventions from within a prestigious heritage”\textsuperscript{148}. Quotation asserts and preserves artistic lineage. Vasari

\begin{footnotes}
\item[146] Shearman, \textit{Only Connect}, 239.
\item[148] Brock, \textit{Bronzino}, 321.
\end{footnotes}
understood his place within the tradition and viewed his art as a continuation of the preceding century’s accomplishments. Therefore, he often used the second form of quotation to imply his place among Italy’s artistic heritage. In the Cancelleria, he took the cycle’s composition from Raphael’s Sala di Costantino but expanded and stylized it. Managing a large workshop and often accepting large works that required a great number of assistants, Vasari often resorted to the third type of quotation. A stock repertoire of figures readily provided the artist with figures to be placed like a pastiche in various works of art. For example, the figure of Justice reappears in the Sala dei Cento Giorni, identified by the attributes invented by Vasari in the original painting of 1543. It is likely that Vasari enjoyed the figure in its original form and gave the design, as a remedy to an iconographic or technical difficulty, to one of the many assistants who painted the room with him in the busy one hundred days of its production. Quotation in this form was a necessity in the sixteenth-century workshop. However, quotations were rarely hollow. Combining the various manifestations of quotation suggests that imitation played a far more significant, and signifying, role in Mannerist painting than has been previously acknowledged149. While the artist might use quotation as a visual shortcut, he often used it as a carrier of signification, both of the work’s theme and its ancestry; thus, it embodies the rule-governed transpositions, impurity of style, and apprenticeship that govern the image’s artificiality.

Vasari’s use of Raphael’s Sala di Costantino (Figure 17) deserves greater attention. Derived from Raphael’s work, the visual complexity places the fresco cycle solidly within the Renaissance tradition, asserting Vasari’s artistic lineage and the patron’s knowledge of the tradition. As the next step in the development of Italian art,

149 See for example, Freedberg, “Observations”.
Vasari multiplied the complexity of the image and heightened its artificiality. Raphael divided his fresco cycle into three bands. In the dado, Raphael painted mimicked reliefs. Historical scenes dominate the central band, and architectural niches housing portraits of the popes flank each scene. In the vaulted ceiling, inventive and fantastic details fill every available space. Vasari followed the three-part division of the wall surface and mimicked the resulting visual games. In both works, the historical scenes are fantastic abstractions. Rather than represent the images as naturalistic windows on the world, as if the artist had simply reproduced his observations of nature on the wall, the artists created artificial scenes. In Raphael’s work, the historical scenes are painted tapestries. In Vasari’s, they appear as stages. They are representations of representations—twice or three times removed from reality. Furthermore, the artists thwarted the viewer’s expectation. Raphael painted the figures of popes in grisaille when one expects them to appear as portraits. In turn, Vasari animated his allegorical figures by painting them in flesh tones when one imagines they will appear as sculptures. The complexity of the visual games depends on the close observation and knowledge of the viewer. On first glance, the historical scenes appear as illusionistic as any other, but on closer observation, one sees the novelty of the tapestry and stage. The viewer must then be aware of the tradition in order to appreciate the artist’s invention, the way in which he plays with perspective and expectation. Similarly, the viewer can only appreciate Vasari’s flesh-toned personifications if he knows Raphael’s grisaille portraits and similarly painted portraits that precede Raphael’s work. The novelty of the image then depends on the viewer’s understanding. Aware of this, the artists invented visual games for the viewer,
and in turn suggested their sophistication by visually and intellectually engaging the viewer.

Derived and exaggerated from this visual game, the multilayered space in Vasari’s work is its most outstanding quality. More than Raphael, Vasari pulls the viewer into the visual game, and by doing so, he creates another level of reality. In both rooms, the viewer stands in the first layer of space. In Raphael’s room, the dado separates the viewer from the image. Illusionistic and real spaces are clearly demarcated, and the viewer is forced to enjoy the image from a distance. In Vasari’s work, illusionistic staircases, painted in perspective, lead the viewer into the painting. Vasari places figures on the stairs to emphasize the transition from reality to painting. In *Universal Homage to Paul III*, a figure climbs the stairs, suggesting that the viewer like the nations represented should enter the scene to pay homage to the pope. As in Salviati’s *Bathsheba Going to David*, the image represents distinct temporal realities collapsed into one visual field. Like Bathsheba, the viewer stands at the base of the stairs. Then, he climbs the fictive stairs. Finally, he reaches the allegorical scene, but he cannot enter the artificial world. The two-dimensionality of the final scene denies him access into the painted world. He returns to the first layer of space, where strangely enough the actions depicted in the allegorical scene occur in reality. In real space, he enacts the drama of the allegorical scene and realizes that the world within the painting is a highly stylized and aggrandized reflection of reality. By incorporating the viewer, Vasari energized actual space and created one more layer to the already complex image.

The final source of artificiality—self-fashioning—is manifest in the image’s iconography. The success of Vasari’s and Giovio’s program rests in its universality. The
room’s public function required delicacy and clever symbolism in its iconography. Commissioned by Alessandro, it was of course a reflection on him, but humility demanded that he not praise himself so overtly. Instead, he deflected praise onto his family’s greatest son, Paul III. Furthermore, the Cancelleria was church property, not Farnese property. Therefore, Vasari and his iconographer could not design a room of Farnese deeds, as Salviati would paint later in the Palazzo Farnese and Taddeo Zuccaro at Caprarola. As Robertson notes: “It would have seemed all the more important to avoid offence and excessively partisan adulation in the Sala dei Cento Giorni, given that the palace was not Farnese property, and would revert to the Church after Alessandro’s vice-chancellorship”\textsuperscript{150}. Alternatively, Vasari and Giovio designed the room around its public function. The historical and allegorical scenes represent the peace, gifts, patronage, and honor of the papacy. In the one truly historical scene, the \textit{Peace of Nice}, the designers glossed over the pope’s dubious dealings with the emperor and French king which united them only temporarily and later threatened the successful organization of the Council of Trent; instead, they universalized the image, using the historical scene as a vehicle to represent the universal concept of peace\textsuperscript{151}. The technique has been called “mixed painting”. Aggrandizing factual events, the designers transformed history into allegory and deftly sublimated Farnese self-interest and tricky historical facts. In the end, they created an image which ostentatiously glorifies the papacy, but in reality glorifies Paul III, and more pointedly, Alessandro as a member of this lineage.

For Alessandro and Vasari, the Sala dei Cento Giorni was a vehicle for self-fashioning. Limited by the expenses of his grandfather’s projects before 1546, the fresco

\textsuperscript{150} Robertson, \textit{Il Gran Cardinale}, 67-8.
\textsuperscript{151} Robertson, \textit{Il Gran Cardinale}, 65-7.
cycle was Alessandro’s first major commission. Similarly, Vasari had gained notoriety with his *Immaculate Conception*, but the room was his entrance into the Roman art world. Therefore, the room’s success was critical for both patron and artist. In the end, the portraits disappointed Alessandro, but generally he was pleased. And, Vasari would later lament the use of assistants in the room. However, the cycle was successful in its primary motivation: self-fashioning. The iconography boldly but inoffensively trumpeted the family’s virtue and successful entry into Roman society. The style’s sophistication declared the patron’s and artist’s discerning taste and placed Vasari among the descendants of the Renaissance’s greatest masters. In short, as the first major commission for both, the Sala dei Cento Giorni marks Alessandro’s and Vasari’s entrance into the Roman art world. Later, Alessandro would become one of Rome’s greatest patrons, and Vasari one of central Italy’s most sought after artists. But, it is here in the Sala dei Cento Giorni that their careers truly begin. Hailing from humble origins, with much to prove, the artist and patron successfully fashioned their public identities and guaranteed their future success at the Cancelleria.
Conclusion

Rediscovered in the twentieth century, Mannerism enjoyed a brief renaissance in modern scholarship. The sudden and intense interest of scholars demonstrates history’s waxing and waning appreciation for artistic styles. Metamorphosing with each passing century, the definition of Mannerism can appear amorphous and fleeting. But if one attempts vigorously to capture its most essential qualities, one finds that Mannerism represents art in its truest form, the artificial and aesthetic object. The self-consciousness of the style’s artificiality provides an interesting contrast to the common interpretation of the Western tradition, that of a style progressing towards greater naturalism and illusionism, and ought to provide the foundation for any study of Mannerism.

Equipped with the developments of the Renaissance, the Mannerist artist readily applied the previous century’s techniques to an ever-increasingly sophisticated and erudite style. Having written the history of Italian art himself, Vasari was well-aware of his style’s relation to its predecessors. Furthermore, his personal and professional goals motivated him to pursue self-fashioning through his artistic style and professional endeavors. Molding his character after the learned members of Italy’s court, he fashioned a courtly and artful identity for himself, associating himself with the court’s learned elite and Italy’s greatest artists. While never free of self-interest, his efforts were surprisingly magnanimous. In all of his projects, he sought to advance the interests of his art and fellow artists, and more surprisingly he succeeded. Perceiving art as a means of self-fashioning, he and his art were much sought after by mid-century patrons. First in the Cancelleria and later under Cosimo I de’ Medici, Vasari’s efforts at self-fashioning aligned with those of his patrons. Working with skilled advisers and knowledgeable
patrons, Vasari advanced the careers of two of Italy’s most influential men.

Understanding the importance of patronage in defining a public image, Alessandro was an ideal patron for Vasari. In their efforts at the Cancelleria, Alessandro declared his illustrious position in his family’s glorious history and his well-deserved position within Roman society. Simultaneously, Vasari used his works of art as means of personal and professional advancement. In the end, he too earned a respected position within Roman society, rising to the position of an artist courtier and raising the status of his art with him.
Figure 1. Pontormo. *Descent from the Cross*. 1525-28.
Oil on panel. Capponi Chapel, Sta. Felicita, Florence.

Figure 2. Rosso Fiorentino. *Descent from the Cross*. 1521.
Oil on panel. Pinacoteca di Volterra.
Figure 3. Rosso Fiorentino. *The Dead Christ with Angels*. 1524-27. Oil on panel. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.


Figure 6. Giorgio Vasari. *Allegory of the Immaculate Conception*. 1541. Oil on panel. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.
Figure 7. Giulio Clovio. *Queen of Sheba before Solomon* from the Farnese Hours. 1546. Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.


Figure 10. Francesco Salviati. *Bathseba Going to David*. 1552-54. Fresco. Palazzo Sacchetti, Rome.


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