

# CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	vii
<i>Note on the Translation</i>	xv
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	xviii
<i>A Chronology of Giorgio Vasari</i>	xxi

*The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, Written by Giorgio Vasari, Painter and Architect of Arezzo, Revised and Extended by the Same, Along with Their Portraits, and with the Addition of the 'Lives' of Living Artists and Those Who Died Between the Years 1550 and 1567*

## PART ONE

Preface to the <i>Lives</i>	3
Cimabue	7
Giotto	15
Simone Martini	37
Duccio	43

## PART TWO

Preface to Part Two	47
Jacopo della Quercia	59
Luca della Robbia	66
Paolo Uccello	74
Ghiberti	84
Masaccio	101
Filippo Brunelleschi	110
Donatello	147
Piero della Francesca	163

Fra Angelico	169
Leon Battista Alberti	178
Antonello da Messina	185
Fra Filippo Lippi	191
Andrea del Castagno and Domenico Veneziano	201
Domenico Ghirlandaio	210
Sandro Botticelli	224
Andrea del Verrocchio	232
Mantegna	242
Pinturicchio	250
Perugino	256
Luca Signorelli	268

## PART THREE

Preface to Part Three	277
Leonardo da Vinci	284
Giorgione	299
Raphael	305
Properzia de' Rossi	339
Rosso Fiorentino	345
Giulio Romano	359
Domenico Beccafumi	377
Jacopo da Pontormo	394
Michelangelo	414
Titian	489
The Author: To Artists of the Art of Design	509
<i>Explanatory Notes</i>	512

# PART ONE

## *Preface to the Lives\**

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I know it is an opinion commonly accepted among almost all writers that sculpture, as well as painting, was first discovered in nature by the peoples of Egypt; and that some others attribute to the Chaldeans the first rough carvings in marble and the first figures in relief; just as still others assign to the Greeks the invention of the brush and the use of colour. But I would say that design, the basis of both arts, or rather the very soul which conceives and nourishes within itself all the aspects of the intellect, existed in absolute perfection at the origin of all other things when God on High, having created the great body of the world and having decorated the heavens with its brightest lights, descended with His intellect further down into the clarity of the atmosphere and the solidity of the earth, and, shaping man, discovered in the pleasing invention of things the first form of sculpture and painting.\* Who will deny that from man, as from a true model, statues and sculptures were then gradually carved out along with the difficulties of various poses and their surroundings, and that from the first paintings, whatever they might have been, derived the ideas of grace, unity, and the discordant harmonies produced by light and shadows? Thus, the first model from which issued the first image of man was a mass of earth, and not without reason, for the Divine Architect of Time and Nature, being all perfect, wished to demonstrate in the imperfection of His materials the means to subtract from them or add to them, in the same way that good sculptors and painters are accustomed to doing when by adding or subtracting from their models, they bring their imperfect drafts to that state of refinement and perfection they seek. . . \*

I am convinced that anyone who will discreetly ponder this matter will agree with me, as I said above, that the origin of these arts was Nature herself, that the inspiration or model was

the beautiful fabric of the world, and that the Master who taught us was that divine light infused in us by a special act of grace which has not only made us superior to other animals but even similar, if it is permitted to say so, to God Himself. And if in our own times (as I hope to show a little further on through numerous examples), simple children, crudely brought up in the woods and prompted by their liveliness of mind, have begun to draw by themselves, using as their models only those beautiful pictures and sculptures in Nature, is it not much more probable and believable that the first men—being much less further away from the moment of their divine creation, more perfect, and of greater intellect, taking Nature as their guide, with the purest of intellects as their master, and the world as their beautiful model—originated these most noble arts, and, improving them little by little, finally brought them from their humble beginnings to perfection? . . . \*

But because after carrying men to the top of her wheel, either for amusement or out of regret Fortune usually returns them to the bottom, it came to pass that almost all of the barbarian nations in various parts of the world rose up against the Romans, and, as a result, not only did they bring down so great an empire in a brief time but they ruined everything, especially in Rome itself. With Rome's fall the most excellent craftsmen, sculptors, painters, and architects were likewise destroyed, leaving their crafts and their very persons buried and submerged under the miserable ruins and the disasters which befell that most illustrious city. Painting and sculpture were the first to go to ruin, since they are arts that serve more to delight us than anything else; and the other one, that is architecture, since it was necessary and useful to the welfare of the body, continued, but no longer in its former perfection and goodness. Had it not been for the fact that painting and sculpture represented to the eyes of those being born the men who one after another had been immortalized by their work, the very memory of one or the other of these arts would soon have been erased. Some men were commemorated by images and by inscriptions placed upon private or public buildings, such as amphitheatres, theatres, baths, aqueducts, temples, obelisks, coliseums, pyramids, arches, reservoirs, and treasuries,

and finally upon their tombs; a large number of these was destroyed by brutish barbarians, who possessed nothing human except the physical appearance and name. . . .\*

But among all the things mentioned, what was the most infinitely harmful and damaging to those professions, even more so than the things noted earlier, was the fervent zeal of the new Christian religion, which, after a long and bloody struggle, had finally overthrown and annihilated the ancient religion of the pagans by the number of its miracles and the sincerity of its actions. Then, with the greatest fervour and diligence, it applied itself to removing and eradicating on every side the slightest thing from which sin might arise; and not only did it ruin or cast to the ground all the marvellous statues, sculptures, paintings, mosaics, and ornaments of the false pagan gods, but it also did away with the memorials and testimonials to an infinite number of illustrious people, in whose honour statues and other memorials had been constructed in public places by the genius of antiquity. Moreover, in order to build churches for Christian worship, not only did this religion destroy the most honoured temples of the pagan idols, but, in order to ennoble and adorn St Peter's with more ornaments than it originally possessed, it plundered the columns of stone on the Tomb of Hadrian, now called the Castel Sant'Angelo, as well as many other monuments which today we see in ruins. And although the Christian religion did not do such things out of any hatred for genius but, rather, only to condemn and eradicate the gods of the pagans, the complete destruction of these honourable professions, which lost their techniques entirely, was nevertheless the result of its ardent zeal. . . .\*

Up to now, I believe I have discussed the beginnings of sculpture and painting, perhaps at greater length than was necessary here; I have done so not so much because I was carried away by my love for the arts but more because I was moved by the welfare and common advantage of our own artists. Once they have seen how art reached the summit of perfection after such humble beginnings, and how it had fallen into complete ruin from such a noble height (and consequently how the nature of this art resembles that of the others,

which, like human bodies, are born, grow up, become old, and die), they will now be able to recognize more easily the progress of art's rebirth and the state of perfection to which it has again ascended in our own times. . . .\*

THE END OF THE PREFACE TO THE *LIVES*

## *Preface to Part Two*

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When I first began to recount these lives, it was not my intention to compile a list of artists or to make an inventory, let us say, of their works, nor did I ever think it was a worthy goal in these lives of mine (which, if not admirable, have certainly proven to be a lengthy and painstaking project) to rediscover their number, names, and places of birth or to indicate in which cities and in what precise location these paintings, sculptures, or buildings are presently to be found; this I could have accomplished in a simple index without interjecting my own judgements anywhere. But I have come to realize that writers of histories, those who by common consent have the reputation of having written with the best judgement, not only have not remained content with merely narrating events but have gone about investigating with every care and even greater curiosity the methods, manners, and means that these valiant men have employed in the management of their artistic enterprises; and they have taken pains to explore their errors as well as their successes and remedies, and the prudent decisions they sometimes made in handling their affairs, and, in short, all those ways in which wisely or foolishly, with prudence, compassion, or magnanimity, such men have behaved. These are like the methods of those writers who realize that history is truly the mirror of human life—not merely the dry narration of events which occur during the rule of a prince or a republic, but a means of pointing out the judgements, counsels, decisions, and plans of human beings, as well as the reason for their successful or unsuccessful actions; this is the true spirit of history, that which truly instructs men on how to live and act prudently, and which, along with the pleasure derived from observing events from the past as well as the present, represents the true goal of history.\* For this reason, since I have undertaken to write the history of these



most noble artists in order to serve these arts in so far as my powers allow, as well as to honour them, I have tried as best I can, imitating such worthy men, to hold to the same methods. And I have endeavoured not only to tell what such men did but, as I narrate, to pick out the better works from the good ones, and the best works from the better ones, noting with some care the methods, colours, styles, traits, and inventions of both painters and sculptors. To inform those readers who would not know how to do so for themselves, I have investigated as carefully as I knew how the causes and origins of their styles as well as the improvement or decline of the arts which have occurred in various times and among different peoples.\* And since at the beginning of these *Lives*, I spoke of the nobility and the antiquity of these arts in so far as it was necessary at that point, I left aside many details from Pliny and other authors I might have made use of, had I not wanted (perhaps contrary to the opinion of many) to leave each reader free to observe for himself the visions of others at their proper source. It seems to me it is now advisable to do what was not appropriate for me to do earlier, if I wished to avoid tediousness and length—mortal enemies of close attention—that is, to disclose more carefully my thoughts and intentions, and to demonstrate my reason for dividing this body of lives into three sections.

It is certainly true that although greatness in the arts is achieved by some artists through hard work, by others through study, by others through imitation, and by still others through a knowledge of all the sciences which assist these arts, there are some artists who succeed through most or all of the above-mentioned qualities. Nevertheless, as I have spoken sufficiently in the individual lives about the methods of art, its styles, and the reasons for good, better, and pre-eminent workmanship, I shall now discuss these matters in general terms, more particularly, the quality of the times rather than the individuals whom I have divided and separated into three groups—or periods, if you will—beginning from the rebirth\* of these arts and continuing down to the century in which we live, avoiding the minute details and clarifying the obvious differences which can be recognized in each of them. Conse-

quently, in the first and most ancient period, the three arts may be seen to exist in a state very far from their perfection; and although they may have possessed some good qualities, they are accompanied by so many imperfections that they certainly do not deserve great praise. Still, since they provided, if nothing else, a beginning as well as the method and style for the better art which subsequently followed, it is impossible not to speak well of them and to attribute to them a bit of glory which, if they are to be judged according to the perfect rules of art, the works themselves did not deserve. In the second period there is a clear improvement in invention and execution, with better design and style, and greater accuracy; and so, artists cleaned away the rust of the old style, along with the awkwardness and lack of proportion typical of the coarseness of those times which was the cause. But who would dare to say that in this second period there existed a single artist perfect in every respect? And who has brought things up to the standards of today in invention, design, and colouring? And who has observed in their works the soft shading away of figures with dark colouring, so that light remains shining only on the parts in relief, and, likewise, who has observed in their creations the perforations and exceptional finishes of the marble statues which can be seen today? This kind of praise clearly belongs to the third period, and I may safely declare that its art has achieved everything which could possibly be permitted to an imitator of Nature, and that this period has risen so high that there is more reason to fear its decline than to expect further advances.

Having considered these matters carefully in my own mind, I believe this to be a property and a particular character of these arts—that from humble beginnings, they very gradually improve, and finally reach the summit of perfection. I am led to believe this by having observed almost the same occurrence in other fields of learning, and the fact that there exists a certain relationship between all the liberal arts provides no small argument that it is true. But in the painting and sculpture of former times, something quite similar must have happened, for if their names were changed, their cases would be exactly alike. None the less, if we must trust those who

lived closer to those times and were able to see and judge the labours of ancient artists, it is evident that the statues of Canacus were very wooden, lacking any vitality or movement whatsoever, and were therefore very far from being lifelike, while those of Calamides were said to be the same, even if they were somewhat more delicate than those of Canacus. Then there came Myron, who did not imitate the truth of Nature at all but nevertheless gave his works so much proportion and grace that they can quite reasonably be called beautiful. In a third stage followed Polyclethus and other celebrated artists, who, as is recounted (and as we must believe), produced completely perfect works of art. This same progression must have occurred in painting as well, for it has been claimed (and must readily be believed) that the paintings of those artists who painted only with a single colour—and who were therefore called monochromatists—did not attain a high level of perfection. Subsequently, in the works of Zeuxis, Polygnotus, Timanthes, and others who employed only four colours in their paintings, their lines, outlines, and forms were praised, although without a doubt they still left something to be desired. But then in the works of Erione, Nichomachus, Protogenes, and Apelles everything is so perfect and beautiful that one cannot imagine anything finer, since these artists not only painted most excellent forms and bodily movements but also emotions and passions of the soul. However, let us set this topic aside, since we are obliged to refer to other writers who frequently do not agree in their judgements or, what is worse, even on their dates—even though we have followed the best authors—and let us come to our own times, where we have the eye, a far better guide and judge than the ear.\*

To begin with only one of these arts, is it not evident how far architecture improved and progressed from the time of Buschetto the Greek to Arnolfo the German or Giotto? The buildings of those times reflect this in their pillars, columns, bases, capitals, and all their cornices with their deformed ornaments—such as those in Florence's Santa Maria del Fiore, the façade outside San Giovanni, San Miniato al Monte, the bishop's palace of Fiesole, Milan's Duomo, Ravenna's San Vitale, Rome's Santa Maria Maggiore, and the old Duomo

outside of Arezzo—where except for a few good elements remaining from fragments of ancient buildings, there is nothing possessing order or good form. But those men [Arnolfo and Giotto] certainly made considerable improvements in architecture, and under their guidance it made no small progress, for they brought back better proportion and constructed their buildings not only with stability and strength but also with some measure of decoration. Nevertheless, their decorations were confused and very imperfect and, if I may say so, not greatly ornamental, because in their columns they failed to observe that measure and proportion which art required, nor did they distinguish between the Doric, Corinthian, Ionic, or Tuscan orders, mixing them together, following their rules without rules, and constructing them extremely thick or very thin, as they preferred. And all their inventions were derived in part from their own minds and in part from the ancient monuments they observed; and they made their plans extracted in part from the good and in part from the additions of their own imagination, so that when their walls were erected, they possessed a different form. Nevertheless, anyone who compares their works to those which came before them will observe that they were better in every respect and will see some things that do not cause any kind of displeasure in our own day, such as some of the little temples of brick covered with stucco at San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome.

I could say the same thing about sculpture, which, in the first period of its rebirth, possessed some very good qualities after having abandoned the awkward Greek style, which was so crude that it was closer to quarry work than to the skill of artists, since its statues—which can, in the strict sense of the word,\* be called statues—were entirely devoid of folds, poses, or movement of any kind. Then, after Giotto had greatly improved the art of design, figures in marble and stone also improved, such as those done by Andrea Pisano, Nino his son, and other pupils of his, who were much better than their predecessors, since they gave their statues more movement and rendered them with much better poses, as in the work of the two Sieneese, Agostino and Agnolo, who built, as was

mentioned earlier, the tomb of Guido, Bishop of Arezzo, or that of the Germans who created the façade at Orvieto. Thus, in this period sculpture can be seen to have improved a little: the figures were given somewhat better forms, and the folds in the garments hung more beautifully; some of the heads had more interesting expressions, and certain of the poses were less rigid. In short, those artisans had begun to find the good, but they nevertheless failed to attain it in countless ways, since in those days design had not reached its full perfection, nor were there many good works to be seen and imitated. As a result, those masters who lived in this period and who have been placed by me in the first part [of my *Lives*] deserve praise and should be given recognition for what they accomplished, especially if we consider that along with the architects and painters of those times, they had no assistance from their predecessors and had to find their way by themselves; and any beginning, no matter how small, is always worthy of no small praise.

Painting did not enjoy much better fortune in those times, except for the fact that since it was used for the devotional practices of the people, more painters existed, and, as a result, painting made more obvious progress than the other two arts. Thus, we can see how the old Greek style, first with the progress made by Cimabue and then with the assistance of Giotto, was completely set aside, while a new style was born from it which I would willingly call Giotto's style, since it was discovered by him and his pupils and then universally venerated and imitated by everyone. And in this style we can see how the outline completely enclosing the figures, those eyes with their lustreless staring, the feet standing on tiptoe, the pointed hands, the absence of shadows, and the other monstrosities of those Greeks have all been abandoned, giving place to genuine gracefulness in the heads and softness in the colouring. And Giotto in particular improved the poses of his figures and began to exhibit the ability to endow his heads with liveliness, while giving his garments folds, which brought them closer to nature than those before his time, and he discovered something of the art of diminishing and foreshortening his figures. Besides this, he was the first to

express emotions in his works, in which we can recognize to some extent fear, hope, anger, and love; he brought a softness into his style lacking in earlier paintings, which were coarse and rough. And if he failed to execute his eyes with that beautiful movement that they have in life, his weeping figures with delicacy, his hair and beards with softness, his hands with their natural joints and muscles, and his nudes like real bodies, the obstacles confronting his art and the fact that he had not observed better painters than himself must excuse him. And in that period of artistic poverty, everyone can grasp the soundness of judgement in his scenes, his observation of human expression, and his easy obedience to a natural style, because it is also evident that his figures fulfil their purpose, showing in this way that Giotto's judgement was very good, if not perfect.

The same thing is evident in the painters who followed him, as in Taddeo Gaddi's colouring, which is sweeter and more forceful, in his improved flesh-tones and the colours of his garments, and in the more robust movements of his figures. It is evident in the decorum of the narratives composed by Simone [Martini] of Siena, and in the work of Stefano Scimmia and his son Thomas, whose work brought great improvement and excellence to drawing as well as great powers of invention to perspective, and to the shading and blending of colours—all the while keeping to Giotto's style. Similar skill and dexterity were shown by Spinello Aretino, his son Parri, Jacopo di Casentino, Antonio Veneziano, Lippi, Gherardo Starnini, and other painters who worked after Giotto, following his expressions, outlines, colouring, and style, even making some small improvements but not so many that they showed a desire to aim for another standard.

Anyone considering my argument will notice that up to this point, these three arts remained quite sketchy and lacked much of the perfection they deserved; and, certainly, if greater progress had not followed, this improvement would have been of little use and would not merit much attention. I do not want anyone to think I am either so crude or so lacking in judgement that I do not recognize the fact that the works of Giotto, Andrea Pisano, Nino, and all the others I have

grouped together in the first part of my book because of the similarity in their style—when compared to the works of those artists who came after them—do not deserve extraordinary or even modest praise. I was well aware of this when I praised them. But anyone who will consider the nature of the times in which they lived, the scarcity of artisans, and the difficulty of finding good assistants will hold their works to be not only beautiful (as I have stated) but miraculous, and will take infinite pleasure in observing the first principles and those sparks of beauty which began to reappear in painting and sculpture.

The victory Lucius Marcius earned in Spain was certainly not so great that the Romans did not experience even greater ones.\* But having considered the time, the place, the circumstances, the participants, and their number, they held this victory to be stupendous, and even today, it deserves the boundless and lavish praise which writers bestow upon it. Thus, for all the reasons stated above, it seemed to me that these artists deserved not only to be carefully described by me but also praised with the admiration and certainty I have felt. And I think that my fellow artists will not find it annoying to have learned about their lives and to have considered their styles and methods, and perhaps they will derive no little benefit from it. This would please me a great deal, and I would consider it a fitting reward for my labours in which I have sought only to give them, in so far as I could, something that is both useful and delightful.

Now that we have, in a manner of speaking, taken these three arts away from their nursemaids and taken them through their childhood, there comes the second period, during which everything will be seen to improve enormously. Inventions are more abundant in figures and richer in ornamentation; and design is more firmly established and more natural and lifelike; and besides the finishing touches in works executed with lesser expertise but more thoughtful diligence, the style is lighter, and the colours more charming, so that very little remains to be done to bring all these details to the complete state of perfection where they imitate exactly the truth of Nature. First of all, through the study and diligence

of the great master Filippo Brunelleschi, architecture rediscovered the measurements and proportions of the ancients, both in round columns and square pillars as well as in rough and smooth exterior corners; architecture, at that time, made distinctions between the different architectural orders, and revealed the differences between them. It required that they be designed according to rules, that they be pursued with greater orderliness, and that they be partitioned by measurements. The power of design increased and its methods improved, bestowing upon these works a pleasing grace and making manifest the excellence of this art. Architecture rediscovered the beauty and variety of capitals and cornices in such a way that the plans for churches and other edifices were obviously well conceived and the buildings themselves became more ornate, magnificent, and most beautifully proportioned; this is evident in the stupendous construction of the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence and the beauty and grace of its lantern, in the ornate, varied, and graceful church of Santo Spirito, in the no less beautiful edifice of San Lorenzo, and in the most extraordinary invention of the octagonal temple of the Angioli, in the airy church and convent of the Badia at Fiesole, and in the magnificent and grandiose beginnings of the Pitti Palace. Other examples may be found in the commodious and grandiose edifice constructed by Francesco di Giorgio, the palace and church of the Duomo in Urbino,\* as well as in the strong, magnificent castle of Naples, or the impregnable castle of Milan, not to mention many other noteworthy buildings from this period. All in all, these works may safely be described as both beautiful and good, although they do not yet exhibit that refinement and exquisite grace (particularly in their cornices); nor that special elegance and lightness in the carving of leaves and real tips in the foliage; nor other perfections that came later, as we shall observe in the third part, which will follow with an account of those architects who executed everything with perfect grace, finish, ease, and skill, unlike the older architects, whose works none the less can safely be called beautiful and good. I would still not call them perfect because having observed the later improvements in this art, it seems reasonable to me to affirm



that they were lacking in something. There were some miraculous works which have not been surpassed even in our own times, nor perhaps will they ever be in times to come, such as the lantern on the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore and, in terms of size, the dome itself, where Filippo [Brunelleschi] possessed the courage not only to equal the ancients in the main part of the building but also to surpass them in the height of its walls. However, we are discussing the entire period as a whole, and one should not argue from the perfection and special excellence of a single work that the entire period was excellent.

I would say the same about painting and sculpture as well, in which we may still see even today some most exceptional creations by the masters of this second period, such as the works in the Carmine by Masaccio, who painted a naked man shivering from the cold and other lively and spirited works. But as a general rule, these artists did not reach the perfection of those in the third, which we shall discuss at the proper time, since we must now deal with artists of the second period, and the sculptors first of all. These men moved so far from the style of the first period, and they improved upon it so much that they left little for the third to accomplish. And their style contained so much more grace, so much more life, so much more order, design, and proportion that their statues began to seem as if they were living beings and not mere statues, like those of the first period.

The works which were produced during this period of stylistic renewal bear witness to this change, as will be seen in this second part, where the figures of Jacopo della Quercia possess more movement, more grace, better design and care, while those of Filippo reflect a more careful investigation of the muscles, better proportion, and finer judgement, and the same could be said for the works of their pupils. But Lorenzo Ghiberti in his work on the doors of San Giovanni added even more of these qualities, displaying invention, order, style, and design, so that it seems as if his figures move and breathe. Although Donatello lived in their period, I could not decide whether or not to place him among the third group of artists, since his works are comparable to excellent ancient ones. In

any case, I must say that he can be called an example for other artists in the second period, since he himself possessed all the qualities divided among many others, for he imparted to his figures a sense of movement, giving them such liveliness and animation that they can stand comparison with both modern works and, as I have said, those of the ancients.

And painting made the same improvement in these days as sculpture did, for here the most excellent Masaccio completely abandoned the style of Giotto and found a new style for his heads, clothes, houses, nudes, colourings, and foreshortenings. And he gave birth to that modern style which has been followed from those times down to our own day by all our artists and which has been enriched and embellished from time to time with greater grace, better invention, and finer decoration. This will be made evident in detail in the lives of the artists, where we shall recognize a new style in the colouring, foreshortening, and natural poses; a more highly expressive depiction of feelings and physical gestures combined with an attempt to make their designs reflect the reality of natural phenomena; and facial expressions which perfectly resemble men as they were known by the artists who painted them. In this way, these artists attempted to produce what they saw in Nature and no more; in this way, their works came to be more highly regarded and better understood; and this gave them the courage to establish rules for perspective and to make their foreshortenings exactly like the proper forms of natural relief, while proceeding to observe shadow, light, shading, and other difficult details, and to compose their scenes with greater similitude; and they tried to make their landscapes more similar to reality, as well as their trees, grass, flowers, skies, clouds, and other natural phenomena. They did this so well that it can be boldly declared that these arts were not only improved but were brought to the flower of their youth, giving promise of bearing fruits to follow and, in a short while, of reaching their age of perfection.

And now, with God's help, we shall begin the life of Jacopo della Quercia from Siena, and then other architects and sculptors until we reach Masaccio, who was the first to improve design in painting, where we shall show how great a

debt is owed to him for painting's new rebirth. I have selected Jacopo as a worthy beginning for this second part, according to the order of styles,\* and I shall proceed to teach in the lives themselves the difficulties presented by the beautiful, exacting, and most venerable arts.

THE END

## *Preface to Part Three*

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Those excellent masters we have described up to this point in the Second Part of these *Lives* truly made great advances in the arts of architecture, painting, and sculpture, adding to the accomplishments of the early artists rule, order, proportion, design, and style, and if they were not perfect in every way, they drew so near to the truth that artists in the third group, whom we shall now discuss, were able, through that illumination, to rise up and reach complete perfection, the proof of which we have in the finest and most celebrated modern works. But to clarify the quality of the improvements that these artists made, it will not be out of place to explain briefly the five qualities I mentioned above and to discuss succinctly the origins of that true goodness which has surpassed that of the ancient world and rendered the modern age so glorious.

In architecture, rule is, then, the method of measuring ancient monuments and following the plans of ancient structures in modern buildings. Order is the distinction between one type and another, so that each body has the appropriate parts and there is no confusion between Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Tuscan orders. Proportion in architecture as well as sculpture is universally considered to be the making of bodies with straight, properly aligned figures, and similarly arranged parts, and the same is true in painting. Design is the imitation of the most beautiful things in Nature in all forms, both in sculpture and in painting, and this quality depends upon having the hand and the skill to transfer with great accuracy and precision everything the eye sees to a plan or drawing or to a sheet of paper, a panel, or another flat surface, and the same is true for relief in sculpture. And then the most beautiful style comes from constantly copying the most beautiful things, combining the most beautiful hands, heads, bodies, or legs together to create from all these beautiful qualities the most perfect figure

possible, and using it as a model for all the figures in each of one's works; and on account of this, it is said to be beautiful style.

Neither Giotto nor those early artisans did this, even though they had discovered the principles underlying all such difficulties and had resolved them superficially, as in the case of drawing, which became more lifelike than it had been before and more true to Nature, and in the blending of colours and the composition of the figures in scenes, and in many other things, about which enough has already been said. And although the artists of the second period made extraordinary efforts in these crafts in all the areas mentioned above, they were not, however, sufficient to achieve complete perfection. They still lacked, within the boundaries of the rules, a freedom which—not being part of the rules—was nevertheless ordained by the rules and which could coexist with order without causing confusion or spoiling it; and this freedom required copious invention in every particular and a certain beauty even in the smallest details which could demonstrate all of this order with more decoration. In proportion, they lacked good judgement which, without measuring the figures, would bestow upon them, no matter what their dimensions, a grace that goes beyond proportion. In design they did not reach the ultimate goal, for even when they made a rounded arm or a straight leg, they had not fully examined how to depict the muscles with that soft and graceful facility which is partially seen and partially concealed in the flesh of living things, and their figures were crude and clumsy, offensive to the eye and harsh in style. Moreover, they lacked a lightness in touch in making all their figures slender and graceful, especially those of women and children, whose bodies should be as natural as those of men but yet possess a volume and softness which are produced by design and good judgement rather than by the awkward example of real bodies. They also lacked an abundance of beautiful costumes, variety in imaginative details, charm in their colours, diversity in their buildings, and distance and variety in their landscapes.

And although many of these men, like Andrea Verrocchio, Antonio del Pollaiuolo, and many other more recent artists,

began by seeking to make their figures more studied and to display in them a greater sense of design along with the kind of imitation that would achieve a greater similarity to natural objects, they did not attain that level of perfection which displays even greater confidence. However, they were moving in the right direction, and their works might well have been praised in comparison with the works of the ancients. This was evident in Verrocchio's efforts to repair the legs and arms of the marble *Marsyas* at the home of the Medici in Florence, which still lacks a refined and absolute perfection in its feet, hands, hair, and beard, even if everything was done according to antique style and possessed a certain proper proportion in its measurements. If these artisans had mastered the details of refinement which constitute the perfection and the flower of art, they would have created a robust boldness in their works and would have achieved the delicacy, polish, and extreme grace they do not possess, despite the diligent efforts which endow beautiful figures, either in relief or in painting, with the essential elements of art. They could not quickly achieve the finish and certainty they lacked, since study produces a dryness of style when it is pursued in this way as an end in itself.

The artisans who followed them succeeded after seeing the excavation of some of the most famous antiquities mentioned by Pliny: the *Laocoon*, the *Hercules*, the great torso of *Belvedere*, the *Venus*, the *Cleopatra*, the *Apollo*, and countless others, which exhibit in their softness and harshness the expressions of real flesh copied from the most beautiful details of living models and endowed with certain movements which do not distort them but lend them motion and the utmost grace. And these statues caused the disappearance of a certain dry, crude, and clear-cut style which was bequeathed to this craft through excessive study by Piero della Francesca, Lazzaro Vasari, Alesso Baldovinetti, Andrea del Castagno, Pesello, Ercole Ferraresc, Giovanni Bellini, Cosimo Rosselli, the Abbot of San Clemente, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Sandro Botticelli, Andrea Mantegna, Filippino Lippi, and Luca Signorelli. All these artisans made every effort, seeking to achieve the impossible in art with their labours, and especially

in their displeasing foreshortenings and perspectives, which were as difficult to execute as they are unpleasant to look at. And while the majority of them were well drawn and free from error, they were nevertheless completely lacking in any hint of the liveliness and softness of the harmonious colours that Francia of Bologna and Pietro Perugino first began to display in their works. And the people ran like madmen to see this new and more realistic beauty, absolutely convinced that it could never be improved upon.

But their mistakes were later clearly demonstrated by the works of Leonardo de Vinci, who initiated the third style which we call modern; besides his bold and powerful design and his extremely subtle imitation of all the details of Nature, exactly as they are, his work displayed a good understanding of rule, better order, correct proportion, perfect design, and divine grace. Abounding in resources and most knowledgeable in the arts, Leonardo truly made his figures move and breathe. Following after him somewhat later was Giorgione of Castelfranco, whose pictures possessed a delicacy of shading and a formidable sense of motion through his use of the depth of shadows, which he well understood. Fra Bartolomeo of San Marco was by no means less skilful in giving to his own paintings a strength, relief, softness, and grace in colour. But the most graceful of all was Raphael of Urbino, who studied the efforts of both ancient and modern masters, taking the best elements from them all; and, by assimilating them, he enriched the art of painting with the kind of complete perfection reflected in the ancient works of Apelles and Zeuxis and perhaps even surpassed them, if it were possible to claim that his work equalled theirs. His colours triumphed over those of Nature herself, and anyone who looks at his works can see that invention was effortless and natural to him, because his scenes, which resemble stories in writing, show us similar sites and buildings, and the faces and clothing of our own peoples as well as those of foreigners, just as Raphael wished to depict them. Besides the graceful quality of the heads in his young men, old men, and women, he carefully represented the modest with modesty, the wanton with lustfulness, and his children now with mischief in their eyes and now in playful poses.

And in the same way, the folds of his draperies were neither too simple nor too elaborate but had a very realistic appearance.

Andrea del Sarto followed his use of this style, but with a softer and less bold colouring; it can be said of him that he was a rare artisan, since his works were without mistakes. It is impossible to describe the extremely delicate vitality that Antonio da Correggio achieved in his works, for he painted hair in a new style which, unlike the refined one used by the artisans before him, was exacting, well-defined, and unadorned rather than soft and downy; the ease with which he painted enabled him to distinguish the strands of hair so that they seemed like gold and even more beautiful than natural hair, which was surpassed by his use of colour.

Francesco Mazzola Parmigiano created similar effects and in many details the grace, decoration, and beauty of his style surpassed even Correggio, as is evident in many of his paintings, which are full of smiling faces, the most expressive eyes, and even the beatings of the pulse, all depicted in whatever way it suited him. But anyone who will examine the wall paintings of Polidoro [da Caravaggio] and Muturino will see figures performing incredible exploits and will be amazed by their ability to create with the brush rather than the tongue (which is easy) formidably inventive scenes in their works which reveal their great knowledge and skill and represent the deeds of the Romans as they actually were. And how many artisans, now dead, were there who brought their figures to life with their colours? Like Rosso [Fiorentino], Fra Sebastiano [del Piombo], Giulio Romano, Perin del Vaga, not to mention numerous living artisans who are themselves well known.

But what matters most\* is that the artisans of today have made their craft so perfect and so easy for anyone who possesses a proper sense of design, invention, and colouring that whereas previously our older masters could produce one panel in six years, the masters of today can produce six of them in a year. And I bear witness to this both from personal observation and from practice; and these works are obviously much more finished and perfect than those of the other reputable masters who worked before them.

But the man who wins the palm among artists both living



and dead, who transcends and surpasses them all, is the divine Michelangelo Buonarroti, who reigns supreme not merely in one of these arts but in all three at once. This man surpasses and triumphs over not only all those artists who have almost surpassed Nature but even those most celebrated ancient artists themselves, who beyond all doubt surpassed Nature: and alone he has triumphed over ancient artists, modern artists, and even Nature herself, without ever imagining anything so strange or so difficult that he could not surpass it by far with the power of his most divine genius through his diligence, sense of design, artistry, judgement, and grace. And not only in painting and colouring, categories which include all the shapes and bodies, straight and curved, tangible and intangible, visible and invisible, but also in bodies completely in the round; and through the point of his chisel and his untiring labour, this beautiful and fruitful plant has already spread so many honourable branches that they have not only filled the entire world in such an unaccustomed fashion with the most luscious fruits possible, but they have also brought these three most noble arts to their final stage of development with such wondrous perfection that one might well and safely declare that his statues are, in every respect, much more beautiful than those of the ancients. When the heads, hands, arms, and feet they created are compared to those he fashioned, it is obvious his works contain a more solid foundation, a more complete grace, and a much more absolute perfection, executed at a certain level of difficulty rendered so easily in his style that it would never be possible to see anything better. The same things can be said of his paintings. If it were possible to place any of them beside the most famous Greek or Roman paintings, they would be held in even greater esteem and more highly honoured than his sculptures, which appear superior to all those of the ancients.

But if we have admired those most celebrated artists who, inspired by excessive rewards and great happiness, have given life to their works, how much more should we admire and praise to the skies those even rarer geniuses who, living not only without rewards but in a miserable state of poverty, produced such precious fruits? It may be believed and there-

fore affirmed that, if just remuneration existed in our century, even greater and better works than the ancients ever executed would, without a doubt, be created. But being forced to struggle more with Hunger than with Fame, impoverished geniuses are buried and unable to earn a reputation (which is a shame and a disgrace for those who might be able to help them but take no care to do so). And that is enough said on this subject, since it is now time to return to the *Lives* and to treat separately all those who have executed celebrated works in this third style: the first of these was Leonardo da Vinci, with whom we shall now begin.

## THE END OF THE PREFACE