MIMETOFOBIA

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The Controversy of Anti-Mimesis in Quattrocento Sculpture

Fifteenth-century Italian sculpture is most often associated with the gleaming smooth surfaces of Ghiberti's baptistery doors, the faultless white bodies in Della Robbia workshop glazed terracotte, the painstakingly rendered statuettes by Antico, or the impeccably polished *Doubting Thomas* by Verrocchio. Leonardo described the prototypical approach to finishing bronze sculpture in the Madrid Codices, writing: "Cleaning, hammering, filing, scraping, and pumicing are necessary to be done with the greatest diligence, because these are the things that determine the surface of the work, and this surface comprises in itself the excellence and grace of the work" (Quoted in Smith 2019: 312). But fifteenth-century views about sculptural finish were not homogenous.

This can be demonstrated by examining a group of several dozen quattrocento sculptures, mainly bronzes, in which extensive tooling is visible on the final products, minimal modeling is a deliberate part of the design, or the artist intentionally left areas of the sculpture unpolished. Among the works that exhibit some of these characteristics are Donatello's decoration of the Old Sacristy in San Lorenzo, Florence; his *Lamentation* relief now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London; his final bronze reliefs, which are now assembled as pulpits in San Lorenzo, Florence; a group of three bronze reliefs that have long been attributed to the multifaceted Sienese artist, Francesco di Giorgio Martini; many works created in cheap materials, often in multiples, that may have been sold to clients or were simply made to circulate among artist workshops, like a cast stucco *all'antica* relief attributed to Francesco di Giorgio of which there are two copies, the *Forzori Altar*, and a great number of reliefs now in the

Bode Museum, Berlin; Bertoldo's *Battle* relief and *Crucifixion* relief, both made for the Medici family; Pollaiuolo's statuettes of *Hercules and Antaeus* in the Bargello, Florence, and of *Hercules* in the Bode Museum; among many others. The presence of such a large collection of works, many of which were displayed publicly, suggests that the alternative style, which I refer to as the rough aesthetic, had an audience. The rough aesthetic was often utilized in sculptures that would be manipulated by hand or examined in close detail, where each abraded surface could be observed, necessarily making the artist's process visible to observers. By abjuring mimesis and instead calling attention to their creative process, fifteenth-century artists underscored their transformative capabilities and mastery over their craft. Over a span of generations, the masters who embraced this alternative style developed techniques to use textured surfaces and anti-mimesis to enhance their sculptures' emotive and dramatic effect. Donatello appears to have been the progenitor of the style, but after his death a number of artists continued to experiment with the rough aesthetic, including Bertoldo, who had been Donatello's student and was an early teacher of Michelangelo, whose *non finito* is closely related to the rough aesthetic. By considering the rough aesthetic a cohesive category within Italian Renaissance art, I argue that it becomes possible to see a burgeoning interest in the creative process as a subject of art in the quattrocento, a phenomenon which is usually ascribed to the following century and, ultimately, to modernism.

The opposite approach to sculptural finish – the one taken by Ghiberti, Verrocchio, the Della Robbia workshop, and Antico – generally accords to the Renaissance idea of mimesis in which a resemblance to reality is mitigated by a high degree of idealism (Halliwell 2002: 344-357), although it is possible to find evidence of a sophisticated approach to materiality that acknowledges that the sculptures are made of metal, stone, or clay rather than actually flesh or cloth (for recent studies of materiality and quattrocento sculpture, see Neilson 2019 and Kupiec 2016). Nevertheless, the intentional anti-mimesis of the rough aesthetic is categorically different from any anti-mimesis in the standard approach to sculptural finish. In each case I discuss, I argue that anti-mimesis is a central characteristic of the rough aesthetic and that this aspect of the sculptures invited viewers to examine traces of the sculptors' hand and therefore consider the object as a product of the artists' intellectual and physical labor. However excitingly prescient of modernism's anti-mimetic attitude the rough aesthetic may be, these works were also deeply controversial in their own time. By examining both the purpose of anti-mimesis in quattrocento sculpture and why it was criticized, I hope to shed light on an early instantiation of a debate that has continued for centuries. Perhaps this will challenge the triumphalist narrative of anti-mimesis that could establish a teleological trajectory setting up Jackson Pollock or Willem de Kooning as the natural apotheosis of aesthetic principles that germinated in the heady intellectual atmosphere of Renaissance Italy. In truth, the path from anti-mimesis in the Renaissance to modernism was anything but predeterminable.

Donatello was the progenitor of the rough aesthetic in Italian sculpture. Today, Donatello's approach to sculptural finish is most associated with Vasari's description of the musician's balcony he made for Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence, between 1433 and 1438. Vasari wrote that the balcony, installed 35-40 feet above the floor of the Florentine Cathedral, was not finished cleanly, but that at this distance the figures truly seemed to be moving. Donatello's *Cantoria* was the companion to a musicians' balcony by Luca della Robbia which, Vasari wrote, was completed with diligence, but from the ground the figures were difficult to read, and the composition appeared enervated. By contrast, Donatello had translated the vibrancy of the sketch into his final product, and the effect was a work that was more lifelike and more mimetic:

> Donatello, che poi fece l'ornamento dell'altro organo che è dirimpetto a questo, fece il suo con molto più giudizio e pratica che non aveva fatto Luca, come si dirà al luogo suo, per avere egli quell'opera condotta quasi tutta in bozze e non finita pulitamente, acciò che apparisse di lontano assai meglio, come fa, che quella di Luca; la quale, se bene è fatta con buon disegno e diligenza, ella fa nondimeno con la sua pulitezza e

finimento che l'occhio per la lontananza la perde e non la scorge bene come si fa quella di Donatello, quasi solamente abbozzata. Alla quale cosa deono molto avere avvertenza gl'artefici, perciò che la sperienza fa conoscere che tutte le cose che vanno lontane… hanno più fierezza e maggior forza se sono una bella bozza che se sono finite (Vasari 1966-1987: III, 51; Vasari retells the story in various forms in different sections of the *Lives*; see also: III, 18; III, 206-207).

Vasari's assessment of Donatello's *non finito* as something that was intended to be invisible on account of its distance from viewers but that subtly enhanced the work's mimesis is best understood in its sixteenth-century context, in which discussion began regarding finish, diligence, perfection, *furore*, and *sprezzatura* in art. Donatello was a particular locus for debate in these contexts, as his finish was discussed not only by Vasari, but also by Michelangelo (through his biographer, Ascanio Condivi), Benvenuto Cellini, Baccio Bandinelli, Bernardo Dazanzati, Giovanni Battista Gelli, and the anonymous author of the *Libro di Antonio Billi*. Whatever the implications of this discussion for cinquecento art theory, these artists and writers poorly described the purpose of Donatello's intentional rough aesthetic.

The first inklings of the rough aesthetic can be seen in the pair of bronze doors Donatello made for the Old Sacristy of San Lorenzo, Florence, completed before 1443 [Fig. 1]. On close inspection of the reliefs it becomes possible to see a degree of abstraction and evidence of the artist's hand that is unexpected in early fifteenth-century sculpture. On St. James the Elder, the hair is depicted in clumps, many of which seem to have been modeled in the wax with the artist's fingers. His face too is modeled with little detail: the eyes are deeply set into their sockets and they almost disappear into shadow; the malar bones are prominent and raised as the cheeks sink, as if into deep ravines, covered by the figure's beard; the brow is depicted simply with no indication of eyebrows, and evidence of modeling by hand appears over the bridge of the figure's nose; a small bronze node, representing the Saint's right nostril, was cast from unmodeled wax.

The bronze alloy Donatello used had an unusually high tin content, more akin to bells than sculpture, resulting in unusual fidelity to his

Fig. 1
Donatello, *Old Sacristy Bronze Doors*, 1434-1443, Bronze, Old Sacristy, San Lorenzo, Florence.

wax model, but a hard and brittle product that would be difficult to chase (Bearzi 1968: 101-102). Faced with such materials, most artists of the time would probably make sure their wax was especially neat and carefully modeled. Instead Donatello left the features abstracted. Perhaps Donatello was attempting to translate the immediacy and spontaneity of preparatory studies into something appropriate for a sculpture commissioned by eminent patrons using expensive materials. Such a description of Donatello's intentions is similar to Vasari's analysis of the purpose of Donatello's approach on the *Cantoria*; however, it is significant that, in the Old Sacristy bronze doors, the anti-mimesis was not hidden by distance but instead was placed in a location where the surface could be examined at close range and even touched.

Donatello did not embrace the rough aesthetic consistently, but there is evidence that he experimented with sculptural finish when conditions allowed, as suggested by the small *Lamentation* panel now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London [Fig. 2]. Traditionally, a bronze sculptor's cold working process gradually erases evidence of his or her hand, but on this sculpture Donatello's chasing of the metal seems intentionally left visible on the bronze. The halos, stippled with hammer marks pounded swiftly into the expensive material, reflect light irregularly to make an interesting and tactile surface.

Fig. 2
Donatello, *Lamentation*, Date Unknown, Bronze, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Photo: Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Each Saint receives a slightly different treatment of peening on their halos to reflect the diverse forms their grief takes. The halo of the mourning woman who hides her head in her hands and turns to run from the central figures is stippled irregularly, forming a craggy and indeterminate mass as she struggles to control her emotion. On the halo of St. John, who stands upright as he buries his distorted face in his hands, hammering with a broad tool creates a somewhat regular pattern. Chasing marks were not polished away on the figures' garments and bodies. Many of the faces were modeled minimally in wax so that they appear muddled and indistinct in the cast bronze. The combination of visible chasing marks with limited modeling makes a startling effect, particularly apparent on the Virgin. Her face and body seem to melt from anguish – she suffers from a grief so extreme she dematerializes in front of our eyes.

Donatello's approach is surprising: at the time most practitioners wanted to elevate sculpture as a humanistic and intellectual endeavor, so they usually concealed the demanding manual labor necessary to transform metal or stone into flesh or cloth. As Amy Bloch and Daniel Zolli write in their introduction to *The Art of Sculpture in Fifteenth-Century Italy*,

> [in Alberti's treatise *De statua*,] the sculptor's labor amounts to mastering a series of geometric, and hence rational exercises… In an era marked by sweeping efforts to elevate that art's social and intellectual

status – to measure its *distance* from manual labor – the messy realities of workshop practice could prove discomfiting (2020: 13-14).

And yet, the *Lamentation* panel unavoidably forces viewers to confront the artist's manual labor in producing the bronze. Donatello's bronze calls attention to his own physical and even brutish technique. The viewer can easily imagine the artist pummeling the bronze, but this might effectively resonate with the sculpture's theme if seen as the artist reflecting the figures' violent mourning.

The importance of Donatello's anti-mimesis in the *Lamentation* has been diminished in much of the previous literature because scholarly consensus had formed around the idea that the panel was a trial piece for Donatello's never completed project for the Siena Cathedral doors, and therefore it could be assumed that the roughness of the bronze surface would have been mitigated if the work was intended for a patron (Kauffmann 1936: 184; Janson 1963: 206-208). Recently, however, Sarah Blake McHam argued that the bronze relief was in fact intended for private devotion in a domestic setting (2017). McHam argued that the varying degrees of finish heighten the tactile appeal of the sculpture and make the relief a more effective object of devotion; she writes: "The different degrees of finish – the contrast of the smooth flesh with the rough drapery surfaces and the sharp edges of the voids – may have been calculated to elicit the emotions of the worshiper who handled the bronze" (2017: 90). The object itself provides clear evidence that the roughness was part of the design. The cold working process always heightens the visibility of Donatello's labor, rather than reduce the evidence of his hand through chasing and polishing with progressively finer tools, suggesting deliberate experimentation with an anti-mimetic approach to bronze sculpture.

Donatello's final works, the eleven bronze reliefs that now comprise two pulpits installed atop porphyry columns in the nave of San Lorenzo, Florence, have possibly the roughest surfaces among all the sculptures made in the fifteenth century. Thanks to research by Andrew Butterfield, we can now be nearly certain that the bronze reliefs were not displayed until 1515 (1994), half a century after Donatello's death, more or less confirming that the reliefs' current state

Fig. 3
Attributed to Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *St. Jerome*, Date Unknown, Bronze, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Photo: NGA Images.

Fig. 4
Attributed to Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Flagellation*, Date Unknown, Bronze, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia, Photo: Author (left).
Fig. 5
Attributed to Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Flagellation* (*Detail from Raking Angle*), Date Unknown, Bronze, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia, Photo: Author (right).

does not match Donatello's plan for the final product. Although some have argued that the reliefs' rough aesthetic is a reflection of the sculptures' unfinishedness, not the artist's intentions, substantial physical evidence suggests that the works would not have accorded with conventional mimetic standards of the time even if they had been brought to completion. Figures throughout the pulpits were cast from limitedly modeled wax, suggesting that Donatello was striving for an amplification of the effect he achieved on the Old Sacristy doors and on the Victoria and Albert *Lamentation*.

After Donatello's death, a handful of artists began experimenting with and advancing upon the rough aesthetic. Among the sculptors who was influenced by Donatello's late style may have been Francesco di Giorgio. If several reliefs that have been attributed to him since the 1920s are correctly assigned, he must have seen the pulpit reliefs in their incomplete state in the early 1470s and then sought to exaggerate and amplify Donatello's rough aesthetic. In the *St. Jerome* relief in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. [Fig. 3], the hermit saint's pose is closely related to Christ's in Donatello's *Resurrection* on the San Lorenzo pulpits, and the figure is peened in a similar way. But the purpose of the rough aesthetic has been extended towards a novel purpose in Francesco di Giorgio's relief: the limited polish helps to hide a menagerie of wild animals by camouflaging them in the craggy landscape. There are eleven animals in the relief, most of them initially difficult to locate, almost all depicted ab-

stractly. For the viewer, finding the animals becomes a sort of game where one searches for fauna and then can attempt to interpret their symbolic purpose. In his book on St. Jerome imagery, Herbert Friedmann partook in exactly the type of reading the artist probably intended, identifying the tortoise as representing heresy, the stag drinking water from a stream as "the human soul seeking salvation," the owl as representative of the Jewish people because it is "a bird of darkness by its own will," and so on (1980: 164-172). Again, this is not a rough aesthetic that is meant to amplify the sculpture's mimetic potential when seen from a distance, but one that requires a viewer to be close enough to the object to see the evidence of the artist's hand; as Luke Syson wrote: "For the artist it was crucial to convey that this was a made piece, that he, like Jerome had chosen an arduous road" (2007: 148).

The *Flagellation* now in the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia [Figg. 4-5], is a sculpture whose inchoate state is integral to its

meaning. The treatment of the surface intensifies the ferocity and barbarity of Christ's attacker: his body is marked by numerous depressions and bumps that read as deep and old wounds, while his fist is depicted as if moving so fast it can hardly be captured in bronze. Heterogenous surface texture on the body of Christ, in the process of being lacerated, creates an intensely moving pathos. Minimal modeling on Christ's face allows it to seem to melt in anguish. His mouth at first seems open to scream, but there is no void in the bronze, his teeth indicated only by a few depressions made with a ball-peen hammer. The denial of mimesis creates the impression of a stifled scream.

The inchoate forms may have an iconographic purpose. The focus on Christ's pain in the *Flagellation* may have made a knowledgeable viewer consider a then three-centuries-old theological debate in a way that no other Renaissance depiction of the scene could. By the fifteenth century, it was established that Christ *chose* to suffer during the Passion, and that his pain was felt more intensely than any human's. The conclusion was reached by considering first that the experience of pain is attributable to human defects; it followed that divinities, being perfect by definition, should not be able to feel pain. If Christ, being fully divine and fully human, had taken on human defects, he must have selected which defects he would accept. Secondly, not only did Christ choose to feel pain, but his experience of pain was more acute than any human's on account of Christ's perfect complexion, according to the contemporary belief that better complexioned bodies perceive physical duress more effectively (Cohen 2009: 205-206). The rough aesthetic of the *Flagellation* is perfectly calibrated to these theological considerations. On the one hand, Christ's pain is highlighted both visually and tactilely. On the other, the impossibility of experiencing the pain he felt is reflected in the abstracted depiction of his face. The rough aesthetic makes Christ's pain visceral and resonant, but also impenetrable and unimaginable. Perhaps the artist recognized that it would be impossible, literally, for him to depict Christ's pain; he could thus only abstractly reference it.

In Florence, the rough aesthetic came to be used to new purpose in *all'antica* art in the Laurentian period. Already in 1977, John Pope-Hennessy noted the Florentine penchant for conducting minimal polish on *all'antica* statuettes, describing a difference in between the Florentine and northern Italian practices in small scale sculpture (1977: 30). Roughness did not necessarily prevent fifteenth-century audiences from appreciating the sculptures. Although statuettes are difficult to track down definitively, the multitude of extant examples utilizing a rough aesthetic seems to indicate that they were considered perfectly suitable for sale and display. In some cases, artists may have scuffed up the surfaces of poorly cast statuettes to make the works more convincing emulations of antiquities, as if the objects had just been pulled from the ground. This may describe what happened with a statuette now in the Bargello that has been attributed to Verrocchio known as the *Pugilist*. The casting was poor and the figure's hand is missing a finger. The arm needed considerable polishing to achieve the prototypical standards of Renaissance finish, but this was not done, perhaps because the artist feared that it was fragile and might break if it was worked. To give the artwork a uniformly rough appearance, the sculptor extensively hammered the surface wherever it was strong enough to withstand the blows (Butterfield 2001: 73). Such an approach was not aimed at making the sculpture mimetic, but instead it enhanced the impression that it was a bona fide antiquity. Later, Michelangelo would rough up the surface of his *Sleeping Cupid* marble to make it a forgery of an antiquity that fooled Cardinal Riario (Condivi 1999: 19-21).

Pollaiuolo utilized a rough aesthetic on his *all'antica* statuettes in a different and more ambitious fashion: the rough aesthetic can be interpreted both as a way to make the object appear more authentically antique and as a mark of self-awareness. The Bargello *Hercules and Antaeus* statuette [Fig. 6] has long been interpreted as an object that demonstrated the sculptor's virtue because the bronze invited comparison to an ancient work described in a famous ekphrastic poem as so lifelike it seemed to breathe and groan. Although the entire statuette is relatively minimally polished, the most important passage for the purposes of this paper is the lion's head on Hercules' cape. Though the lion is dead and skinned, his expression is sym-

Fig. 6
Antonio del Pollaiuolo, *Hercules and Antaeus,* Date Unknown, Bronze, Bargello, Florence.

Fig. 7
Attributed to Antonio del Pollaiuolo, *Hercules*, Date Unknown, Bronze, Bode Museum, Berlin (left).
Fig. 8
Attributed to Antonio del Pollaiuolo, *Hercules* (*Detail*), Date Unknown, Bronze, Bode Museum, Berlin, Photo: Author (right).

pathetic and engaging, making direct eye contact with the viewer when handled at close range. Given the lion head's centrality, it is surprising that it is the most crudely modeled section of the sculpture. The head is heavily peened, and the mane is indicated by curls that are much less detailed than the human figures' hair. However, the face has been carefully tooled, indicating that the rough surface is intentional. The metal's rough treatment allowed the sculptor to distinguish the lion's skin from the grapplers, but it also put evidence of the artist's hand at the very center of the statuette calling attention to Pollaiuolo's masterful craftsmanship even as it disrupted the sculpture's mimesis.

On the *Hercules* statuette in the Bode Museum, Berlin [Figg. 7-8], Pollaiuolo also utilized heterogeneous surface texture deliberately. The body is well polished and was probably treated with a patina to make it gleam in reflected light, but the base was cast from minimally modeled wax. Although the faces on the base may be reminiscent of battered ancient sculpture, the limited modeling of other elements on the base, like the lion's head beneath Hercules' foot, could engender alternative interpretations and are highlighted by the direct contrast to the well-polished body of the ancient hero. The lion's head is swiftly modeled, and it is possible to see evidence of the artist's hand in its mane. Casting, and therefore preserving and displaying, these initial rapidly produced representations of animals

suggests the artist's ability to create something that seems lifelike in an instant and might be seen as an analog to artistic concepts usually attributed to later centuries, like the visualization of ambition, or the demonstration of *bravura*.

Pollaiuolo also may have been attracted to Angelo Poliziano's literary praise of Virgil's language for its blend of styles, which some scholars have discussed already in the context of Michelangelo's *Battle of the Centaurs* marble relief (Summers 1981: 244-245; the *Battle of the Centaurs* was commissioned by Poliziano, according to Condivi). By adopting various degrees of finish on a single bronze, Pollaiuolo could inhabit a multiplicity of voices, so to speak. Surfaces are deliberately smooth at one moment, rough at the next, emulating archaeological finds on the base and therefore suitable to the *all'antica* subject matter, while emulating real flesh on the body.

The largest rough aesthetic works of the quattrocento, perhaps demonstrating the high watermark of its popularity, are the se-

Fig. 9
Bertoldo, Palazzo Scala Reliefs, Date Unknown, Stucco, Palazzo Scala della Gherardesca, Florence, Photo: Author.

ries of twelve large-scale stucco reliefs [Fig. 9] in the *cortile* of the palazzo built by Florentine statesman, Bartolomeo Scala, in the 1470s and 1480s. Rather than carefully and slowly mold the plaster into smooth and delicate designs, the artist (almost certainly Bertoldo di Giovanni) left the surface of these reliefs consistently rough and bumpy. The faces are modeled with little detail, hair is sometimes depicted as clumps of plaster with few attempts to define individual strands. Even from the ground, it is sometimes possible to see the marks made by tools or the artist's fingers. From the windows on the first floor one can see air bubbles in the stucco and examine the enigmatic expressions on the faces made more mysterious by the conspicuous minimal modeling. The reliefs were to be a monument to the patron's virtue, a celebration of his political and literary achievements. The reliefs illustrate apologues written by Scala himself, and Bertoldo also inserted canny visual clues into the reliefs indicating that the scenes could be read biographically: Cristina Acidini Luchinat identified several figures as having the features of Bartolomeo Scala himself and interpreted a theme of the reliefs to be the patron's successful rise in political and social stature through his association with Lorenzo de' Medici, whose likeness appears in the guise of Apollo, the overriding hero of the narrative (1998: 97). Knowledgeable viewers also would have enjoyed Bertoldo's numerous quotations from ancient sculptures and contemporary objects;

Alessandro Parronchi identified approximations of ancient sculptures, statues by Donatello, and Medici cameos in the reliefs (1964). Despite this evidence of careful planning, many scholars who wrote about the reliefs have long been vexed by the incongruous, seemingly hasty execution of the stucco modeling. Parronchi appreciated the "considerable skill in borrowing from classical models," but visually he was unequivocally disappointed. He wrote that Bertoldo had been "clumsy… [T]he work smacks of improvisation and is at times monotonous, schematic, badly proportioned and genuinely careless" (1964: 125). Even Bertoldo's great defender, James David Draper, could not help but bemoan the reliefs' "relative crudeness of execution" and the "sad effect" they produced (1991: 220). However, the roughness of the reliefs and the apparent speed of their execution can be explained, and even celebrated, when they are seen in the broader context of a thus far unexamined strain of anti-mimetic thinking in fifteenth-century sculpture.

Bertoldo's anti-mimetic approach called attention to the craftedness of the stucco reliefs, the importance of which was explained in a different context by Scott Nethersole, who has written on Bertoldo's ample use of quotation in the Scala reliefs: "[the quotations] reveal how [the stuccoes] are made to the viewer in a game of 'spot-the-source' and in so doing, display themselves to be an assemblage, a crafted product or *techne* brought together from different sources" (2018: 141). Nethersole concluded that the reliefs were meant to demonstrate their craftedness to the viewer, and this would lead viewers to see the reliefs as more than depictions of an *all'antica* world, but something that had been made by a contemporary and therefore conveyed a Christian moral meaning, appropriate since the reliefs illustrate Scala's apologues which have moralizing themes. Nethersole was especially concerned with three reliefs depicting violence, drunkenness, and bestiality, arguing that knowledgeable viewers were actually being encouraged to consider that which elevated man above beast, a recurring theme in quattrocento philosophy. Nethersole wrote: "Although [the reliefs] present scenes of drunkenness, violence, war, and bestiality, the fact of their creation – loudly declared in their medium, their visual sources, and

their underlying ideas – suggests a state of civilized rationality on the part of the patron and the viewer" (2011: 482). The quick and ostentatious modeling of the stucco, like the ample use of quotation, reinforced the idea that the reliefs were deliberately crafted, and therefore it acts as a sort of flashing light, calling on viewers to consider those who made the reliefs and the moral messages they must have intended.

That Bartolomeo Scala wanted to welcome distinguished guests into his home with a series of anti-mimetic sculptures demonstrates a certain cultural acceptance of the rough aesthetic, but evidence suggests that the style was not widely acclaimed in its own time. It should not be surprising that in the fifteenth century – when artists like Leonardo considered the clean finish of bronze sculpture to be not only necessary, but the aspect that determined "the excellence and grace of the work" – the rough aesthetic had the potential to be controversial. In particular, the rough aesthetic's embrace of sculptural sketchiness must have seemed bizarre to those in the artistic mainstream. Rough aesthetic sculptors were trying to elevate the sketch, or *bozza*, form into something that was acceptable for a commissioned work. But the sculptural *bozza* was traditionally a provisional state, so rough aesthetic sculptures were dangerously close to being considered unfinished and therefore imperfect. The rough aesthetic might be acceptable to Florence's humanistically-inclined, antiquity-obsessed elite, who may have enjoyed seeing evidence of the artist's hand; but in 1482 when Verrocchio petitioned his patrons for money to finish the *Doubting Thomas* for the façade of Orsanmichele, Florence – a highly public work that would be visible to all Florentines – he specifically noted that the work would be spoiled [*guastarsi*] if it was installed while still a "boza" (Covi 1993: 7). Also in 1482, Gentile de' Becchi wrote a letter to Lorenzo de' Medici in which he criticized Donatello, the originator of the rough aesthetic, using the verb *bozzare* as an antonym to *finire*. Gentile described Donatello as someone with too much *inventione*, whose example should not be followed because he knew how to sketch better than how to finish: "[e sa] bozzare più che finire…" (the let-

ter is discussed and partially transcribed in Caglioti 2008: 29-31; the letter was digitized by the Archivio di Stato di Firenze: http://www.archiviodistato.firenze.it/map/riproduzione/?id=51880). Gentile had just toured the enormous construction site that would eventually become the Medici villa at Poggio a Caiano. Evidently the scale of the proposed building project, then in a very early stage of progress, both impressed and concerned him, and he wrote to Lorenzo to warn him that if the project was going to be a success, Lorenzo must avoid Donatello's faults. Although Gentile does not mention any specific artwork, he probably hoped the reference would call Donatello's San Lorenzo project to mind, since it was an ambitious and expensive commission made by Lorenzo de' Medici's grandfather, Cosimo, that Donatello had not completed. Ironically, today the rough aesthetic's unfinishedness makes it appealing to art historians interested in the modern concept of *non finito* (Penny 1994; Bayer 2016; Rudigier 2016), but at the time such associations made the rough aesthetic precarious.

Renaissance viewers could criticize the rough aesthetic on a variety of other points. The emulation of damaged antiquities might have perplexed some contemporaries accustomed to interpreting ruins in the backgrounds of religious paintings as signifying the triumph of Christianity over pagan antiquity, not to appreciating the beauty of the fragmentary form. Even humanists who revered classical antiquity might consider Roman ruins not as something to be imitated, but as a symbol of cultural hegemony that had been allowed to deteriorate by previous generations, and therefore a painful loss. The self-reflexivity of Pollaiuolo's or Bertoldo's rough aesthetic also could have been received negatively in the fifteenth century. It might have reminded contemporary viewers of the truism "ogni pittore dipinge sé", and that was not necessarily a good thing. Savonarola cited this maxim as evidence that painting ought to be mistrusted, its apparent mimetic relationship to reality only a falsehood that tricks viewers into believing what was in fact the painter's *concetto*. Artists, he said, were vain, "così li filosofi" (Savonarola 1955: I, 343). Savonarola's statement betrays a sense of mimetophobia, and although he might have approved of the anti-mimesis of rough aes-

thetic religious imagery like Francesco di Giorgio's *Flagellation* because it suggested the artist's inability to visualize Christ's pain, the *all'antica* rough aesthetic that was common in the Florence he knew might have instead suggested the artist's vanity because it placed the sculptor at the center of the artwork. Savonarola's statement suggests that this was a risky proposition in the fifteenth century.

The rough aesthetic's brief heyday came to an abrupt end when its practitioners and chief patrons died in quick succession at the end of fifteenth century. Bertoldo died in 1491. Bartolomeo Scala died in 1497, three years after his political power and cultural clout was severely curtailed by the Savonarolan regime. Antonio del Pollaiuolo died in 1498, but he seems to have abandoned the rough aesthetic when he moved to Rome in 1484. Francesco di Giorgio died in 1501 but appears to have abandoned the rough aesthetic when he moved to Siena in 1485. Therefore, when the Savonarolan regime was overthrown in 1498, replaced by a new Republican government that supported the arts, the practitioners and supporters of the rough aesthetic had either died or abandoned the style, with one exception: Michelangelo.

Michelangelo was trained as a sculptor when the rough aesthetic was at its height. As a young man he tapped into a new, extremely rich symbolism in the *Madonna of the Stairs* and the *Battle of the Centaurs* by producing his rough aesthetic in marble instead of bronze or stucco. In stone, the visibility of Michelangelo's labor suggested that the artist was ferociously excavating figures trapped in the rock, and this eventually became a defining characteristic of his artistic process. But on most of his finished works, Michelangelo strove for a high degree of polish; his incomplete statuary is now beloved, but Michelangelo himself bemoaned the fact that his most ambitious sculptural projects remained unfinished or were executed at a greatly reduced scale than he intended (Hirst 1997: 77-78). Michelangelo rarely credited his antecedents, and so knowledge of the rough aesthetic was lost; even Vasari seems not to have realized that followers of Donatello embraced a radical approach to sculptural finish.

In the nineteenth century, as an anti-mimetic attitude became part of artistic orthodoxy, *non finito*, inspired in large part by Michelangelo's unfinished sculptures, became a prevailing theme of modern art. Rodin studied Michelangelo's *non finito* in Florence during a week-long trip in 1876 and subsequently replicated the aesthetic for the remainder of his long career in works that mark "a transition from the closed formal language of the 19th century towards the fragmentary, open form of Modernism" (Wohlrab 2016: 243). In the twentieth century, plaster casts of Michelangelo's unfinished sculptures could be found in the studios of Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and Salvador Dalí. Today, a parallel to Michelangelo's chiseled surfaces can be found in the work of Ursula von Rydingsvard, who leaves the marks made by the right-angle grinder visible on her monumental wood sculptures. The natural question, then, is to ask to what extent did the rough aesthetic of the quattrocento influence Michelangelo's *non finito* and therefore deserve a place among the most important legacies of the Renaissance. Unfortunately, answering this logical query risks celebrating only the aspects of Renaissance art that are prescient of modernism while ignoring those that are not, and can potentially lead to anachronistic interpretations of art objects. Accepting and giving voice to the negative interpretations of the rough aesthetic makes it possible to see why the style was, in its own time, a decidedly alternative genre of sculpture. Too often, art historians read that as a sort of relegation. However, shed from the burden of foreshadowing modernism, the rough aesthetic can be enjoyed for its radicalism and for its small but important role in shifting the Renaissance discourse about art. Effectively, when artists abjured mimesis, they called attention to their own hand and made the creative process itself a subject for discussion.

Too often, discussions of quattrocento mimesis delve no deeper than recitation of its presence in Alberti's treatise on painting, letting that stand for the views of the entire century. In fact, as this article has attempted to demonstrate, the fifteenth-century approach to mimesis was exceptionally complex and at the center of considerable debate and controversy. Perhaps nothing exemplifies the

vagueries of the subject more than recognizing that all the artists who embraced the anti-mimetic rough aesthetic also utilized the standard high degree of finish common of the time when needed: note for example, the impeccable polish of Donatello's *Atys-Amorino*, Francesco di Giorgio's angels for the Siena Cathedral, Pollaiuolo's Sixtus IV tomb, or Bertoldo's *Bellerophon and Pegasus*.

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