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# Memory In Paintings of Quattrocentro Renaissance Florence: Religious paintings and Secular Portraits

Ashley Matcheck
*University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

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Portrait of the Donor Nera Corsi, Domenico Ghirlandaio, c. 1485

*Giovanna degli Albizzi Tornabuoni*, Domenico Ghirlandaio, c. 1488/1490
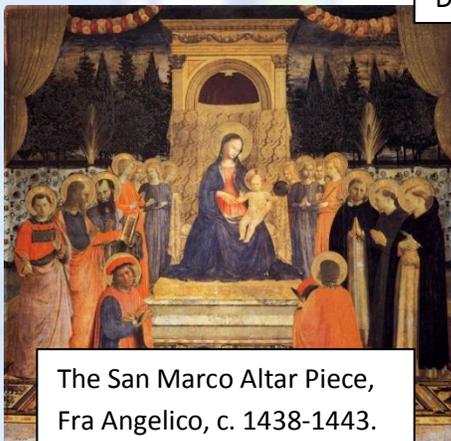
The San Marco Altar Piece, Fra Angelico, c. 1438-1443.

Profile Portrait of a Young Man, Tommaso di Giovanni di Simone Cassai Masaccio, year unknown

Portrait of Galeazzo Maria Sforza, Piero del Pollaiuolo, c. 1471

Collective memory studies as a field has always been the interdisciplinary study of how and why memories have been created. The difference between collective or cultural memory studies and that of a strictly historical study is often discussed and debated as people question 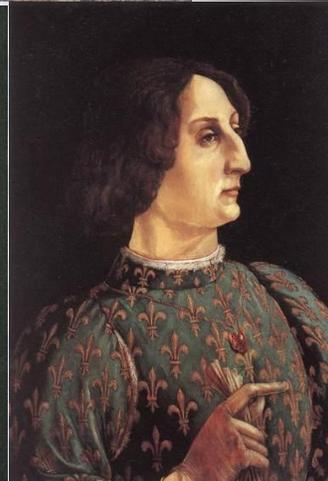whether memory or history is more valuable regarding past events. Jan Assmann explains that "in the context of cultural memory, the distinction between myth and history vanishes. Not the past as such, as it is investigated and reconstructed by archaeologists and historians, counts for the cultural memory, but only the past as it is remembered." Assmann has the perspective that while an historical event took place in a certain way the memory of the event in itself is worthy of recognition and exploration.[1] However, whether or not studying the past as history or as memory is more appropriate is not the concern here. This paper will focus on how the approach of memory studies is able to bring memory into historical perspective as an element of influence and a catalyst for memorialization that took place through painting in Quattrocentro Florence. The use of paintings as objects of immediate memory was practiced by the Florentines as a form of "social memory," a term coined by art historian Abby Warburg to refer to a cultural level of memory. Interestingly enough despite the use of paintings for immediate memory in fifteenth century Florence, Jan Assmann credits Warburg with being the first art historian to recognize and treat images or "cultural objectivizations" as carriers of memory.[2] This may be a relevant

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1. Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," In *Media and Cultural Memory: Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook,* ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 113.
2. Ibid, 110.

statement for contemporary art history, however a key theorist of the fifteenth century, Battista Alberti noted that in regard to paintings as a form of memory of deceased individuals, "the dead were seen by 'the living many centuries later,'" referencing a clear recognition of the power of images to act as carriers of memory centuries before any field of memory studies was formalized.[3]

Paintings occupy one space in the material aspect of a theory of culture in memory studies. Astrid Erll's theory on memory studies is a perfect introduction to the study of memory in paintings in which Erll states that "culture can be seen as a three-dimensional framework, comprising social (people, social relations, institutions), material (artifacts and media), and mental aspects (culturally defined ways of thinking, mentalities) (cf. Posner)."[4] The intersecting pillars of the theory are evident in Renaissance Florence where each aspect can be seen to play a role in the creation of these memories -- from the political motivations for commissioning works to the cultural influence on ideals of beauty and fashion, to the resulting paintings themselves. These "reminding objects" are important as intermediaries between the rememberer and the thing to be remembered, as Assmann states that "things do not 'have' a memory of their own, but they may remind us, may trigger our memory, because they carry memories which we have invested

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3. Patricia Simons, "Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women," In *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy,* ed. Alison Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 264.
4. Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," In *Media and Cultural Memory: Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook,* eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008) 4.

into them."[5] The use of paintings to create an immediate memory is done not by the object itself but through the interaction between the painting and the viewer in which the symbols convey a meaning particular to the content. These "outward symbols" of memory are able to influence and create immediate memory through this dialogue.[6]

Painting was a form of memory creation for the city of Florence as a public and propagandist means of spreading political influences as well as a form of memory creation for family memory, or what Erll considers "group memory."[7] The creation of memory is an appropriate phrase for the art of this time and place in regards to both the content of religious paintings and the manipulation of individual portraits. Patricia Rubin has written that in "Florence the endowment, construction, decoration, and display [of the city and individuals] are instruments of status and affirmations of a desired *status quo*. They are also, to some degree, a false memory. The results of these activities created an alternative reality."[8] The obvious grandeur of the city and individuals was apparent in the decoration and display however the memory creation took place in the paintings themselves. The immediate effect of this falsified memory was the establishment and maintenance of political power and the reputation of individuals to fit the ideals for men and women in fifteenth century Florence. The power to shape the immediate memory of the viewer existed through both the selection of the occasion for

5. Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 111.
6. Ibid, 111.
7. Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies," 2.
8. Patricia Rubin, "Art and the Imagery of Memory," In *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence.* eds. Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 68.

commissioning a painting and the individual's desire to convey a certain ideal or message within it. The management of perception was evident in the style and symbolic value of the Florentine art. For paintings with an intended political or public message there was always a need to control the message and include republican ideals. "Remembering needs occasions and it is selective by necessity. What is remembered and what is forgotten first of all depends upon the subjective management of identity, which in turn is steered by emotions, needs, norms, and aims."[9] The messages of paintings commissioned with political intentions were influenced ultimately by the desire to maintain a powerful and charitable public image. For more personal memory creation "Florence's citizens produced a more autonomous, privatized family memorial in the form of commissioned portraiture."[10] This creation of immediate memory through the fifteenth century art in Florence is challenged by Allison Wright as not intentional memory creation as much as the act of commemoration.[11] The commemoration of events was not the only purpose for the portraiture, as Wright seems to acknowledge, and for those that were created to commemorate a family member (as was often the case for women) the act of commemoration itself must be investigated. Ultimately, the commemoration through portraiture took place with the result in

9. Schmidt, Siegfried J., "Memory and Remembrance: A Constructivist Approach," In *Media and Cultural Memory: Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook,* eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008) 193-194.
10. Patrick Geary, "The Historical Material of Memory," In *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence,* eds. Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 24.
11. Alison Wright, "The Memory of Faces: Representational Choices in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Portraiture," In *Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence,* eds. Giovanni Ciappelli and Patricia Lee Rubin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 88.

mind that the individual would be remembered for his or her dignity and high social rank. Whether or not commemoration was an aspect driving the commissioning of a painting, the desire to fashion an idealized and manipulated image and memory played an undeniable role in the creation of some paintings in Quattrocentro Florence, especially those used in commemoration. Those pictured were meant to be remembered, in the immediate memory, as dignified members of an elite class worthy of memorialization.

Patrick Geary wrote that "the study of historical memory is a study of propaganda, of the decisions about what should be remembered and how it should be remembered" and although Geary was referring to written texts this statement is certainly applicable to visual texts as well.[12] Historical memory and collective memory must be carefully investigated as terms, but when using art as the historical text in the exploration of collective memory the distinction does not seem necessary, especially in the case of a falsified memory. To worry about the historical accuracy (and therefore the historical memory) of any piece of art would shed light on the intended inconsistencies, however, the falsified memory was created in just this light with intentional manipulation and allegorical references. Italian Renaissance art has been studied from the perspective of its use as propaganda specifically in the political realm as a way for leading families to gain political prestige, secure a position of power, and to promote the family's memory throughout time.[13] Patricia Rubin states that the "visual arts played a key role in

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12. Patrick Geary, "The Historical Material of Memory," 17.
13. Patricia Rubin, "Art and the Imagery of Memory," 69.

securing and declaring positions" for elite families.[14] The well known Medici family has been a prime example of how elitist families used art in this fashion.

A popular piece commissioned by rich patrons, including the Medici family, was the altar piece set within the family chapel.[15] The desire for these massive and elaborate decorative scenes on religious subjects emerged around the thirteenth century with advances in art techniques.[16] Jacob Burckhardt notes that many monasteries preferred outside patronage for works within their cloisters rather than commissioning the works themselves. They relied on wealthy patrons who in turn wanted to instill a sense of memory for their families within many of the works, such as the altar piece.[17] These paintings were meant to create a memory of pious citizens and by extension the entire family, as Rupert Shepherd notes that "certain practices regarding religious art in Renaissance Italy were predicated upon the belief that images in some way embodied the individuals they represented."[18] Cosimo Medici's motivations to fund the restoration of the San Marco Dominican convent and commission the San Marco Altar Piece along with several other major works flowed out of the need to establish himself as the "effective ruler of Florentine

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14. Ibid.
15. Brian Kempers, *Painting, Power and Patronage: The Rise of the Professional Artist in the Italian Renaissance,* trans. Beverley Jackson (London: Penguin Group, 1987) 171.
16. Jacob Burckhardt, *Italian Renaissance Painting according to Genres,* trans. David Britt and Caroline Beamish (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2005) 97.
17. *Ibid,* 117.
18. Rupert Shepherd, "Art and life in Renaissance Italy: a blurring of identities?" In *Fashioning Identities in Renaissance Art,* ed. Mary Rogers (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2000) 68.

Republic" following his return from exile in 1434.[19] Cosimo managed to re-establish himself despite the success of his political rivals, the Strozzi family, who had Medici exiled. Cosimo received an invitation back to the city only one year later after Medici partisans regained power in that September's elections.[20]

Twenty years after this return Medici's position as a sort of ruler of Florence was evident through the arrangement of the Peace of Lodi that joined Florence, Milan, and the Kingdom of Naples against Venice and the papacy. Kenneth Gouwens credits Medici with having played a large role in engineering the treaty of 1454.[21] To have been in the position to arrange such an agreement between three city-states and to establish the "'balance of power' (a term used before the end of the century to describe the situation)"[22] speaks of Cosimo's political influence beyond even his locale of Florence. Medici's unofficial rule falls into a description of tyrannical power which Gouwens describes in the oligarchical republics as illegitimate, taken and by force, and maintained through individual prowess.[23] Medici's efforts to solidify his power through creation of immediate memory within the city are evident within his patronage of art. The San Marco Altar Piece was commissioned after the restoration of San Marco under Cosimo's direction to

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19. Malcolm Oxley, "The Medici and Gozzoli's Magi," *History Today* 44, no. 12 (December 1994) under http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.library.unlv.edu/ehost/detail?vid=6&hid= 17&sid=280de518-c3d9-4846-95fc 88ef8b599317%40sessionmgr13&bdata=JnNpdGU9 ZWhvc3QtbGl2Z Q%3d%3d#db=aph&AN=9501236341 (accessed April 24, 2011).
20. Kenneth Gouwens ed., *The Italian Renaissance: The Essential Sources* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) 108.
21. Kenneth Gouwens ed., *The Italian Renaissance,* 3.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.

serve the Dominicans in an attempt to help beautify the city, provide religious support, and ultimately create a memory of Cosimo as a charitable figure and a member of the elite social class.[24] The painting includes Saint Cosmas and Saint Damien, both figures important to the Medici family as the former was Cosimo's patron saint and the latter that of his dead brother.

With an inviting glance at the viewer the Saint Cosmas acts as mediator between the viewer outside the picture and the group of saints in heaven and gestures toward the Virgin Mary sitting in a throne with the child Jesus on her knee. Although Cosimo is not directly inserted into the painting, on an allegorical level he can be seen within the representation of the Saint Cosmas. The face of this saint is altered and not idealized as are the faces of the other saints, but instead is said to have resembled Cosimo's face. The San Marco Alter Piece has been interpreted to show that as Cosmas was a "patron and mediator in heaven as Cosimo was on earth, Saint Cosmas was his direct link to the supreme intercessors, the Virgin and Christ, as the heavenly court of a judgmental God."[25] The implication exists within this piece that Cosimo was a powerful patron able to grant anyone who took audience with him exactly what they required for earthly salvation, where they could find their needs meet by a saintly man. The parallel relationship created between Medici and Saint Cosmas is only a partial explanation for the symbolism within this painting and many more exist to propel the Medici name to the front of the immediate

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24. Malcolm Oxley, "The Medici and Gozzoli's Magi."
25. Dale Kent, *Cosimo de Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: The Patron's Oeuvre* (London: Yale University Press, 2000) 156.

memory of the viewer. The Medici coat of arms is present in the decoration on the border of the carpet laid out before the Virgin's throne and within the fabric of the carpet are woven zodiac symbols representative of the Medici family.[26] The incorporation of finer details to the more obvious reference to Cosimo Medici as Saint Cosmas reveals a clear intention to create an immediate memory of the power of Cosimo and his family for the viewer of the painting.

Including a saint in a commissioned painting was not unusual and did not endanger Cosimo's rule, however, because during this period saints began to emerge as "eloquent personalities"[27] and many patrons included saints in their work. The organization, placement of content, and attention to the form of every object demonstrates the use of symbols and relationships facilitating the creation of an immediate memory of the Medici family's charitable works and power.[28] Dale Kent points out that Cosimo Medici's intentions for commissioning art are "unrecoverable" and historians can never reconstruct the intended dialogue between the viewer and each piece with absolute certainty.[29]  Still, there is a general consensus among historians that Cosimo did knowingly and intentionally use paintings as political propaganda. John Paoletti gave the general interpretation held by himself and other scholars in concluding that Cosimo Medici's "'use of individual commissions as a means of social and political control

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26. Dale Kent, *Cosimo de Medici,* 156.
27. Jacob Burckhardt, *Italian Renaissance Painting*, 70.
28. Dale Kent, *Cosimo de Medici,* 159.
29. Ibid, 347.

is now commonplace in discussions of his patronage.'"[30] Evidence of Cosimo Medici's awareness of how to skillfully use paintings to his political advantage is found in the writing of Machiavelli. He wrote in 1525 that Cosimo was aware not to commission works of excessive style because he knew the dangers of attracting feelings of envy from political enemies and rivals.[31] Ultimately, refuting Kent's argument seems almost unnecessary because as Assmann notes it is not so much what actually happened in the past but how it was remembered which is important for memory studies.[32] It seems that Cosimo Medici was ultimately trying to preserve the appearance of the republican atmosphere of Florence while undermining the social and political institutions of the city in order to essentially gain the advantages of the feudal lord.[33]

The altar piece existed alongside another form of religious painting, the donor piece, which was on occasion substituted for an altar piece but more commonly functioned an accessory. The donor piece was intended to create a memory of the subject and to increase his or her family's prestige within the religious community and among fellow laymen. Donor pieces were sometimes used as altar pieces with the distinguishing characteristic that the conventions

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30. Ibid, 349.
31. Jonathan K. Nelson and Richard J. Zeckhauser, *The Patron's Payoff: Conspicuous Commissions in Italian Renaissance Art,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 57.
32. Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 113.
33. Robert Williams, "The notion of beauty in Francesco Bocchi's *Bellezze della citta di Fiorenza*, II," In *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art.* eds. Ames-Lewis, Francis and Mary Rogers (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1998) 200.
34. Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender Representation Identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997) 63.
35. Ibid.

were to show persons "in profile, kneeling, against a simulated marble background" as opposed to altar pieces showing religious scenes such as the Procession of the Magi.[34]

The donor piece generally served as an indication that the person pictured was to be prayed for and when placed specifically in a family chapel it was meant to show that prayers for salvation were meant to be directed toward the entire family.[35] The portraits of Nera Corsi and her husband, Florentine banker Francesco Sassetti, conform to this idea. Corsi and Sassetti's donor portraits flank the altar piece of the kneeling Virgin in worship of Christ in the Santa Trinita Chapel.[36] In the absence of allegory the donor piece did not create a memory of individuals as being able to directly speak with saints or Jesus, however they did emphasize religious devotion through the proximity of the individual to the Virgin or Jesus. While women were included in the donor portraits it is important to note that they were seen as representations of their family and not as the Renaissance individual. The donor piece included symbols to convey to the viewer that the person portrayed functioned to represent his or her family as a pious and respectable group and therefore serving a similar function as the altar piece in the creation of memory. In the pieces placed around the Sassetti sarcophagi there is a repeated use of the symbolic sling with inset stones, a part of the Sassetti coat of arms.[37]

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36. Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art,* 63.
37. Ibid.
38. Ibid.

Unlike the more elaborate paintings, usually used for the altar piece, the donor piece showed the religious demeanor of the individual and his or her family through the symbolic use of clothing. The clothing of the more dramatic altar pieces was more elaborate in the quality and color while the much more subdued clothing of the donor piece reflected the republican ideals of Florence where "an overt showing of luxury was not deemed appropriate" and instead those pictured were shown in a state of humility.[38] The traditional dress for the donor paintings did include expensive garments; however, they created an immediate memory of a more serious and spiritually mature individual. The most important and essential aspect of dress within the art of the period was not the lavishness but actually whether or not the clothing was appropriate for the situation.[39] The typical dress for women in the donor portrait is seen in the portrait of Nera Corsi who wears a cloth head covering and a subdued and restrained dark dress.[40] The persons pictured in these portraits did not always dress in a humble manner in their daily lives and this is exactly why donor portraits played a role in the manipulation of memory. To show these men and women in a humble state where fancy clothing and jewelry were absent created the idealized pious individual in serious prayer.

Another donor piece shows Isabella d'Este dressed similarly to Nera Corsi in the respectable and pious clothing that resembles that which a widow might wear in her time of

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39. Jane Bridgeman, "'*Condecenti et netti…*': beauty, dress and gender in Italian Renaissance art," In *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art.* eds. Ames-Lewis, Francis and Mary Rogers (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1998) 45.
40. Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art,* 63.

mourning. Her "somber and restrained garb" includes a black mantle and a white head cloth that echoes the picture of Dominican nuns on the opposite donor piece flanking the center altar piece.[41] Isabella d'Este did not actually wear subdued clothing but instead, like other women of leading families, wore much more luxurious and colorful clothing. She was sometimes described by her contemporaries as an inventor of new fashion or a woman of great luxury.[42] Picturing women in the black dress and white head covering was important in facilitating the memory of these individuals as humble and pious. They still maintained their high social rank through the richness of the subdued fabric and therefore were still able to portray an image of respectability and wealth.

In Quattrocentro Florence memory within the family itself was portrayed with simpler portrait paintings. These paintings were "equally concerned with a public construction of memory" as with family memory.[43] They include both men and women and, like the donor portraits, when women are shown they are intended to refer to the family they represent. Therefore, regardless of the subject of the painting, the ultimate goal was the memory of the individual's family as a prestigious and beautiful group. Patricia Rubin notes that, in the case of female sitters, regardless of the patron or occasion for memorialization the portrait signified that the woman was respectable but more importantly she represented the wealth and reputation of her family. In the patriarchal culture of Florence women were not credited for the success of

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41. Ibid, 62.
42. Ibid.
43. Alison Wright, "The Memory of Faces," 88.

their families but instead their husbands were given recognition for a woman's respectable choices and intelligence.[44] Alison Wright gives the same conclusion. "Of course, in the case of the female portrait, connotations of power associated with the profile are firmly attached to the sitter's family rather than to the individual herself."[45] This creation of immediate memory for the family made portraits of this sort problematic in the Florentine Republic as they reflected the elevated status of pictured individuals. The manipulation in both male and female portraits was meant to convey the social values of the ideal republican male and the respectable matronly female. For this reason the Medicis themselves appear to have avoided commissioning portraits, instead accepting the honor of being asked to sit as subjects of paintings.

Usually a portrait was created to commemorate a social event outside of the family itself except in the case of those commissioned posthumously, done for both men and women.[46] The commissioning of the portraits achieved the reflection of the ideals of the Republic through the portrayal of a beautiful person. Italian Renaissance philosopher Marsilio Fincio discussed the outward beauty of an individual as a reflection of the inward soul. This idea was so powerful that the possibility of an unattractive individual having a good soul was outright rejected by Fincio.[47] The concept of beauty in the Renaissance permeated all aspects of life for men and women so

44. Patricia Simons, "Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization," 275.
45. Alison Wright, "The Memory of Faces," 92-93.
46. Ibid, 88-91.
47. David Hemsoll, "Beauty as an aesthetic and artistic ideal in the late fifteenth-century Florence," In *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art.* Eds. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1998) 68.

much that Jacob Burckhardt studied "the beauty of women's role and appearance" and "the beauty of the perfection of man."[48] The manipulation of the subject was used to produce an idealized image of a beautiful, well formed person, as was the norm for the portraiture in the beginning of the fifteenth century.[49] The image of the body in a perfected state was achieved through a manipulation of the sitter to achieve ideal proportions and physical perfection.[50] Other changes made to a sitter's appearance included the creation of a pleasing linear form and the use of a lightened skin tone.[51] According to Paola Tingali the "traits of the ideal female beauty fashionable during the fifteenth century seem to have been developed for the purpose of being represented in a profile portrait." The traits Tingali discusses are certainly evident within female portraits of the time and include the long line that runs from the hair pulled back from the forehead to the neck and the emphasizing of hair braided or somehow made into a bun with rich head jewels to expose the profile. Other ideal characteristics of feminine beauty included the rounded forehead and plucked eyebrows with well defined cheek and jaw bones.[52] The standard portrayal of physical beauty did involve slight variations among artist and patrons. There were instances when the manipulation of an individual's characteristics was just varied enough from

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48. Elizabeth Cropper, "Introduction," In *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art.* Eds. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1998) 1.
49. Alison Wright, "The Memory of Faces," 105.
50. Sharon Fermor, "Poetry in motion: beauty in movement and the Renaissance conception of *leggiadria*," In *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art.* Eds. Francis Ames-Lewis and Mary Rogers (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1998) 126.
51. David Hemsoll, "Beauty as an aesthetic and artistic ideal," 68.
52. Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art,* 50.

portrait to portrait to result in a multitude of slightly different portrayals of that person. According to Patricia Simons the "variations among portraits of the same person, such as Francesco Sassetti or Isabella d'Este, can be so marked that no one work can be considered the authoritative likeness."[53] The manipulation of memory existed not only in the allegorical or religious sense but also in the manipulation of a person's physical appearance to achieve the affect of an attractive individual. The representation of a physical beauty, whether or not it was accurate, reflected the inward soul of the individual portrayed and therefore created an immediate memory of an attractive, wholesome individual.

The representation of elite individuals in a typical state of dress, one of luxury, was achieved through individual portraiture as a reflection of the status of the individual's family. Clothing and jewelry were important in portraits of women as both helped to convey the family's status. Finer cloth and jewelry were regulated in distribution and limited to the consumption of certain class in Quattrocentro Florence and therefore valued for symbolic quality. Clothing made from certain fabrics, made with an excess amount of material, or detailed with embroidery was limited to the elite men and women of society. Jewelry restrictions were class based and regulations stipulated how much could be worn at any one time.[54] Clothing and jewelry regulations were created with sumptuary laws from the thirteenth century and by the fifteenth century these laws appear to have been motivated by economic, social, or moral concerns. In the

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53. Patricia Simons, "Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization," 268.
54. Elizabeth Birbari, *Dress in Italian Painting: 1460-1500* (Chatham: W & J Mackay Limited, 1975) 7.

Florentine Republic the implementation of these laws would fall on the side of moral and social control to encourage the leveling of social classes. In reality, however, the laws actually increased the distinction between classes as certain types of clothing and jewels became accessible to only the wealthiest members of society.[55]

Clothing played such an important role in Renaissance Italy that it was discussed in private letters between women and sometimes their husbands or sons. Isabella d'Este and her sister Beatrice often wrote to one another about exquisite clothing they were having designed or already possessed, referencing the details of embroidery with "heavy gold thread" or distressing over imperfect details.[56] In a letter from Alessandra Strozzi to her son she discussed her daughter's wedding and the clothes given to her by her new husband. "When she was betrothed he ordered a gown of crimson velvet for her made of silk and a surcoat made of the same fabric, which is the most beautiful cloth in Florence…And he ordered some crimson velvet to be made up into long sleeves…"[57] The reflection of the importance of clothing is reflected in secular portraiture where subjects wear expensive, incredibly detailed clothing in the attempt to create an immediate memory of wealth and social standing.

The posthumous *Portrait of Giovanna degli Albizzi* portrays the ideal woman of dignity and honor through ideal physical characteristics, fine clothing, and exquisite jewelry. She is portrayed with all of the physical markers of beauty including fair skin and a rounded forehead

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55. Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art,* 50-51.
56. Elizabeth Birbari, *Dress in Italian Painting,"* 8-12.
57. Kenneth Gouwens ed., *The Italian Renaissance,* 110.

with barely visible eye brows. Perhaps an important distinction here is that Giovanna's hair although up in a bun has loose pieces falling down which disrupt the line of her face. Tangali notes that this is ideal for the feminine concept of beauty. Aside from the loose pieces, her hair is in an elaborate bun with a fine piece of ribbon intricately woven throughout. Her calm disposition and gently folded hands portray a dignified woman. Certainly her physical features portray an immediate memory of her as an ideal woman worthy of remembrance. Her clothing is made of a rich fabric with layers and a significant amount of embroidery in a beautiful gold color along a majority of the dress, a marker of her high social standing. The sleeves of her dress are of a second fabric with lace and include an intricate design; both also signify her elitist rank. The placement of the sleeve in the picture is important. Sleeves were often made to detach from the dress to be worn often because they were made of particularly rich fabric and had extremely fancy designs.[58] "Heraldic devices" were often embroidered into the clothing the show the linage of a woman.[59]

The portrait of Giovanna, like all portraits at this time, was meant to create a memory of her family, particularly the male patriarch and his linage. The heraldic device is just about the visible sleeve, an 'L' to represent her marriage to Lorenzo Tournabuoni. The device is obviously important in the portrait as it is placed centrally and certainly emphasizes Giovanna's husband.[60]

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58. Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art,* 53.
59. Ibid, 50-52.
60. *Art and Love in Renaissance Italy*. Ed. Andrea Bayer (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008) 303.
61. Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art,* 69.

In the profile picture of an unidentified man, *Profile Portrait of a Young Man,* the viewer is given the impression of respectability through an almost expressionless demeanor and defined jaw. As with the portrait of Giovanna Albizzi, the fair skin is contrasted against a dark background for emphasis. The sitter is wearing a very elaborate head piece and the rounded forehead is also visible. Again, the eyebrows appear to be almost invisible. According to Giovanni Pontano, who wrote at the end of the fifteenth century, it was appropriate for young men to wear garments that were "vivacious and elegant" as this increased respect that one could receive.[61] Certainly the young man has achieved this and although his name is no longer known the portrait would have created an immediate memory of a man with desirable qualities. Another portrait of a male sitter pictures Galeazzo Maria Sforza and appears to be a more honest portrayal of the sitter whose features are less linear. Sforza is portrayed with light skin contrasted against a dark background. His cheeks are well defined and he has a rounded forehead emphasized by a commonly placed hairline. His sleeves are elegant and his clothing conforms to Pontano's recommendation that they are chosen according to age and rank.[62] His portrait creates an image of high social standing and respect which would have been transferred to the immediate memory of the viewer.

Whether paintings were commissioned to create an immediate memory regarding individuals and families for political, religious, or social purposes, the culture of the fifteenth

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62. Jane Bridgeman, "'*Condecenti et netti…,*'" 45. Bridgeman notes that "young men" were those under the age of 30.

century Italian Renaissance played a large role in dictating the content of the paintings as well as the physical appearance and fashion of the subjects. This three dimensional framework of the social, material, and mental aspects as components of memory[63] were evident in Florence in the use of the paintings. These representations were meant to influence social relationships, were themselves influenced by culture, and were material components of memory in themselves. Paintings as a medium to create an immediate social memory served as a valuable method for the elite families in Quattrocentro Florence to ensure that, through interaction with viewers, the paintings would provide an idealized although manipulated image of families and individuals.

*Ashley Matcheck completed her B.A. at UNLV, and continued to the M.A. program studying Early Modern European history. She has recently set her sights on the M.A. business program at UNLV, and is currently serving as the Vice President of Psi Sigma chapter of Phi Alpha Theta.*

63. Astrid Erll, "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction," 4.