

From Cult to Culture. The Orsanmichele Madonna Between Art and Devotion

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Abstract: This paper constitutes an encompassing account of the Madonna of Orsanmichele in all its historical instances. As source of the first miracle ever recorded in the city-state of Florence, in 1292, the Orsanmichele Madonna generated a cult that lasted centuries. Considering the extravagant artistic commissions on the site of the granary-turned-church, Orsanmichele became a place of religious worship, and, more importantly, grown into being equated with the political and spiritual identity of Florence. The panel by Bernardo Daddi and the tabernacle designed by Andrea Orcagna have generated, I argue, a parallel cult – one revering the exquisite artistic draughtsman ship of the painting and that of its monumental shrine. In this paper I aim to present the dialogue between the Marian cult located at Orsanmichele, starting in the thirteenth century, and the artistic patronage prompted by the popularity of the miracle-making image of the Virgin. My study represents a critical re-visitation of the prominent book by Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, published in 2013.

Keywords: miraculous image; Marian devotion; Florentine art; trecento; altarpiece; tabernacle

Titlul articolului: „De la cult la cultură. Madonna Orsanmichele între artă și devoțiune”

Rezumat: Articolul acesta constituie o discuție amplă asupra Madonnei Orsanmichele în toate instanțele sale istorice. Ca sursă a primei minuni atestate vreodată în orașul-stat Florența, în 1292, Madonna Orsanmichele a generat un cult care a durat secole. Având în vedere comenzile artistice extravagante din grănarul devenit lăcaș de cult, Orsanmichele a devenit un loc de venerație religioasă, și, mai mult, s-a dezvoltat într-un simbol politic și spiritual al Florenței. Panoul pictat de Bernardo Daddi și tabernacolul conceput de Andrea Orcagna au generat, în interpretarea mea, un cult paralel – unul dedicat meșteșugului de excepție a altarului pictat și a ciboriului care îl înconjoară. În acest articol, caut să prezint dialogul dintre cultul marial localizat la Orsanmichele, început în secolul treisprezece, și patronajul artistic determinat de popularitatea imaginii făcătoare de minuni a Fecioarei. Studiul meu reprezintă o revizitare critică a cărții de referință ce discută imagini făcătoare de minuni scrisă de Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, publicată în 2013.

Cuvinte-cheie: imagine facatoare de minuni; devoțiune; arta florentina; trecento; altar; tabernacol.

Introduction

Megan Holmes, in the introduction of her account of Florentine miraculous images, stated that her investigation would also analyze the rich contributions of visual artists to the outstandingly rich devotional culture built around miraculous images. This trace of thought is, however, pursued rather inconsistently throughout the book, her focus being more the concrete analysis of the cults and the story of the venerated images that prompted them. In the case of Orsanmichele, the extent to which artists participate in the devotion is truly remarkable – from Bernardo Daddi's panel of the Madonna, Andrea Orcagna's monumental tabernacle, the sculpted decoration of the façade, the very elaborated program of stain-glass windows and even the songs dedicated especially to the painted image – this site is, in earnest, a stronghold of culture generated by a cult.

My claim is that the cult of the Madonna of Orsanmichele was so pervasive that it reverberated for more than two centuries, generating numerous artistic projects on the inside and outside of the grain-market, and later, oratory. The first such example of culture emanating from the cult is Daddi's Madonna itself, which represents the third rendition of the miraculous 'nostra Donna'. The amplitude of the Virgin's cult in the grain-market of Orsanmichele is powerfully enunciated by the enshrinement designed by Orcagna. My account will, therefore, focus on the discussion of the decision of the Orsanmichele confraternity to commission a third Madonna and the subsequent consignment of its framing. Additionally, I will try to establish a brief chronology of the artistic projects conducted throughout the fourteenth century that prove the artistic impact of the miraculous image. Finally, I will attempt to correlate these cultural endeavors to the very special status of Orsanmichele, a site of exceptional artistic patronage.

Grain-market Becomes Oratory. A Short History of Orsanmichele

Orsanmichele was originally the grain market of Florence, situated in a nodal point, halfway between the Duomo and the Palazzo della Signoria, the seat of the government, and next door to the palace of the very powerful wool guild, *Arte della lana*. As Florence was fundamentally agrarian, the well-being and prosperity of the city depended on the harvest, and all grain and flour were sold at Orsanmichele. A thaumaturgic object that could ensure the protection and smooth functioning of this vital location was therefore much desirable.¹ During the day, the space was populated by the tradesmen, and it worked as a market, during the evenings, Sundays and feast days, the members of the *laudesi* confraternity met for devotional ceremonies.²

Its name stems from an abbreviation of Orto di San Michele, which translates as "Kitchen Garden of St. Michael". The grain market was established on the site of the kitchen garden of the Cistercian monastery of San Michele in Orto, which was demolished in 1249, possibly on the grounds of the location of the former monastery. In 1284 a Loggia is built to ensure protection during the trading activities, and a granary is built on top; on one of the pillars of the loggia a painted image of the Madonna was recorded. In the next seven years, the said painting of the Virgin would generate a cult, mainly practiced by the merchants and their customers.

In light of the increased commercial *and* devotional activities, the *laudesi* confraternity was founded in 1291, and the first miracles worked by the Madonna were

¹ Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence* (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2013), 69.

² Maria D. Ito, 'The Madonna of Orsanmichele and Her Confraternity: A Holy Wall of Protection for the Florentine Grain Market', 2007, unpublished paper (presented at International Medieval Congress, Leeds, July 2013) 10.

registered in the next year. Soon, the cult received official acceptance from the Bishop and the confraternity was certified in 1294.¹

Cult to Culture. Bernardo Daddi and the New Altar Commission

The cult of the original Madonna of Orsanmichele, which dates to 1292, is, in fact, the first cult that can be documented in the Florentine region (that is, including the *contado*). The place of Orsanmichele in the topography of the city and its crucial economic clout contributed to the augmentation of the Madonna's popularity. We owe the account to Giovanni Villani and his *Cronica* which mentions July the 3rd, 1292 as the day when the first miracle was performed by an image of the Madonna, located on a pilaster of the Loggia, healing the sick, lame and infirm.² After this day, vast crowds of devotees and pilgrims began to venerate the Virgin, and the *laudesi* governed the smooth functioning of its devotion and gathered to perform *laude* composed for the Orsanmichele Madonna³. This first instance of the miracle-making Madonna did not survive for long – on July the 10th, 1304, an acolyte of the Guelfs set a fire directed at the houses of the Ghibellines, situated in the vicinity, leading to an enormous blaze that eventually reached the Piazza of Orsanmichele. In a different report of the fire, relevant for the devotional practice history, we learn that it was in fact caused by the too numerous wax *ex-votos* that were accompanying the miracle-working Virgin.⁴ The painting, either a fresco or a tempera panel, did not survive the fire. The depiction that we see reproduced in the *Libro del Biadaiolo* was the second version (and it was painted around 1308) of the first miraculous image of the Virgin, and it was framed by a tabernacle conceived by the sculptor Giovanni di Balduccio.⁵ (see annex for image reproduction). We can assume

¹ John Henderson, *Piety and Charity in Late Medieval Florence*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 196-197.

² *Cronica di Giovanni Villani a miglior lezione ridotta coll' ajuto de' testi a penna con note filologiche di I. Moutier e con appendici storico-geografiche comp. da France*, (Florence: S. Coen, 1844-45), T. VIII (CLV).

³ 'Any discussion of what Orsanmichele appeared like must eventually entail a discussion of what it sounded like', commentates Blake Wilson in his account of the civic devotional practices of the oratory. From the very beginning of the Madonna's veneration, image and song were orchestrated together to instill and support deeper veneration. The *laude*, performed by the *laudesi* employed by the confraternity, were devotional songs written in the Italian vernacular, composed in the poetic form of *laudata* and sung in monophonic or polyphonic interpretation. The musical devotion performed by the *laudesi* had the clear task of maintaining the efficacy of the miracle-working Virgin. Throughout the fourteenth century, the singing became more elaborate, developing simultaneously with the oratory's exterior and interior decoration. The practice of performing *laude* was essentially built on the belief that sung devotions were a kind of particularly saintly and effective form of persuasion, because they took part in the celestial singing of the divine angels (theme which was to receive prominence in the decorations purported in the second half of the fourteenth century on the walls and stained glass windows of Orsanmichele). Blake Wilson, 'If Monuments Could Sing: Image, Song, and Civic Devotion inside Orsanmichele', in Carl Brandon Strehlke (ed.), *Orsanmichele and the History and Preservation of a Civic Monument*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012), 140.

⁴ Brendan Cassidy, 'Oragna's Tabernacle in Florence: Design and Function', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 55. Bd., H. 2 (1992), 180.

⁵ Johannes Tripps, 'Sulla pratica di celare ed esibire le Madonne Gotiche. Le immagini miracolose della Madonna a Firenze e il loro Contesto Storico', 2010, 6. <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2010/1237>, DOI: 10.11588/artdok.00001237,

that the second rendition *Madonna miracolosa* was intended to reproduce the 'archaic' morphology of the first representation, so that the devotion could continue uninterrupted, together with the income of the *compagnia*.

Bernardo Daddi was commissioned to paint the third miracle-making Madonna in 1346-1347, half a century after the cult was initiated. It is important to stress that the motivation behind this third replacement remains unsettled. The documentary evidence merely points out to Daddi's employment and payment.¹ Given the scarcity of the documents and the missing contract, we cannot determine what instructions he received for the commissioned monumental panel. Holmes states that 'Daddi's task to restage the miraculous image was, in a certain sense, characteristic of cultic practices during the Late Medieval and Renaissance periods. In this reading, it was performed as a form of renewal that was not deemed categorically different from the convention of repainting miracle-working images.'²

Regarding the material aspects of the painting, the Madonna is tempera on poplar panel, and it uses lavish quantities of gold leaf, *pastiglia* and *sgraffito* work. Concerning the formal aspects, this panel comes in a line of traditional Tuscan monumental renderings of the Virgin, of which Duccio's *Rucellai Madonna* and Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna* are also part of. The painting was usually considered to be conceived in a deliberate archaizing style, aspect which was meant to redeem in the eyes of the devotees the original Duecento cult image.³ The iconographical motif of the enthroned Madonna has been associated with Throne of Wisdom representations, and equally as *ecclesia*, a metaphor that was often instrumented in Marian imagery.⁴ Diana Norman points at the architectural conception of the Virgin's throne as a trait of late thirteenth-century iconography, and on the same vein, the presence of the two angels in the foreground. She considers that Daddi was purposely asked by the confraternity to tailor the image so that it would pertain to the same formal characteristics of the original rendition of the Virgin.⁵ Assuming this *liason* between archaic style and cultic efficacy,

¹ Richard Offner, Klara Steinweg, Miklos Boskovits, Mina Gregori, *A Critical and Historical Corpus of Florentine Painting. The Fourteenth Century. The Works of Bernardo Daddi* (Florence: Giunti, 1989), Section III, Volume III, 312.

² Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image*, 146. This brings me to Nagel and Wood's account of a re-making of an image of the Virgin. In the second chapter of *Anachronic Renaissance*, they discuss some practices related to the replication of artefacts, stating that 'classes of artifacts were grasped as chains of substitutable replicas stretching out across time and space'. According to their reading of the substitutional model, the re-made painted icons could be considered efficient surrogates of lost originals by their contemporary audience, and the material components were not taken as crucial for the meaning or function of the object – in our case, the miraculous-making image of Madonna of Orsanmichele. The perceiving of an artefact in substitutional terms meant that the 'chain of replicas' was effectively relegated to the original. Alexander Nagel, Christopher S. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, New York: Zone Books, 2010, 28-30.

³ Holmes, *The Miraculous Image*, 146.

⁴ Marina Vidas has pointed out that the equation of the Virgin with the Church was a recurrent theme in Trecento Florentine renditions. This iconographical motif was based on the Song of Songs. Marina Vidas, 'Devotion, Gold and the Virgin. Visualizing Mary in Three Fourteenth-Century Tuscan Panels in the National Gallery of Denmark', in Andrea-Bianka Znorovsky and Gerhard Jaritz, *Marian Devotion in the Late Middle Ages. Image and Performance*, London & New York: Routledge, 2022), 58.

⁵ Diana Norman, 'The Glorious Deeds of the Commune: Civic Patronage of Art', in Diana Norman (ed.), *Siena, Florence and Padua. Society and Religion 1280-1400*, New Haven & London: Yale

Werner Cohn was encouraged to propose that this third commission directed at Daddi was prompted by the too innovative or progressive style of the second painting. Further, Cohn even advances that the panel of Pian di Mugnone in the Oratorio di Santa Maria Maddalena (painted in the manner of Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna*), was the image that preceded Daddi's Madonna. Because of its naturalistic style, this icon would have failed to deliver miracles and therefore had to be replaced.¹

Holmes refutes this interpretation, based on the difficulty of codifying the style of Trecento painting and, moreover, of Daddi's formation in the tradition of Giottesque Florentine painting. Werner Cohn's interpretation rings more implausible when we take a look at the very small corpus of paintings now certainly attributed to Daddi. By comparing the Orsanmichele Madonna with other renderings of the Virgin executed by him, we see the same composition of the throne, very similar disposition of the angels and an analogous spatial relationship of the figures.

Owing to the recent restoration of Daddi's panel, we have gained more substantial knowledge of the pictorial method. The analysis of the materials used reveals the richness and refinery of the technique. Iconographically, the Virgin dominates the composition, being larger than life (over-life size), and positioned at the center of the painting, sitting on a throne, flanked by eight recessing angels. The enthroned Madonna is a Tuscan and Umbrian typology, usual for the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Holmes aptly describes the Madonna: 'In this painting, self-consciously manufactured as a miraculous image, the lavish ornamentation is akin to the bejeweling of cult images and their draping with fine vestments'.²

Whatever the motives behind this commission (or *reincarnation*, how Blake Wilson calls it³), its staging was scheduled just in time – in 1348 the Black Death hit Florence, and the Madonna could resume her miraculous deeds, protecting the flocks of people in need of a god-sent wonder. The devotees benefited from the Virgin's miraculous touch, and the confraternity all the same, gaining a record-breaking sum of money from the votive offerings and the selling of candles. The sudden wealth that befitted upon the members of the company opened the way for the monumental new commission in the Orsanmichele, namely Orcagna's tabernacle.

From my personal standpoint, Bernardo Daddi's appointment to paint the third miraculous Madonna is an excellent example of cult becoming culture. Considering Daddi's privileged artistic expertise in mid-century Florence, it becomes clear that he was specifically commissioned to create a piece of art. In other words, Daddi's painted Madonna can be seen as a very high standing *ex voto*, desired by the community and excellently executed by Daddi's masterful hand. The third depiction of the Madonna is not by any means archaizing in style. The monumental Virgin enthroned, with its sumptuous materials and elevated craftsmanship is hardly the consequence of the wish to redo the original miraculous image. The *de facto* motivation of the *laudesi* seems to have been the intention to glorify through artistic virtuosity the Madonna of Orsanmichele and reactivate the devotion of the miracle-making representation. This drive is even more effusively expressed through the ambitious commission to Orcagna to design the *tempietto* framing the painting.

University Press, 1995), 147.

¹ Cohn *apud* Holmes, *The Miraculous Image*, 148.

² Holmes, *The Miraculous Image*, 151.

³ Wilson, 'If Monuments Could Sing', 141.

The Monumental Enshrinement. Powerful Cult, Imposing Tabernacle

Apart from the tales surrounding the miraculous images, their enshrinement was a means to physically attest their power. By building tabernacles on the site of a miracle-working image, the intention was to emphasize their extraordinary character and their special cultic status. The shrine also generated the possibility of veiling and unveiling, which was an additional instrument of conveying sacred charisma. The power of the miraculous image was the fundamental aspect that dictated the form and dimension of the ulterior tabernacle, and opting for a free-standing, ornamented and sculpted shrine was the superlative tactic of translating the miracle-working capacities in very persuasive visual terms. The tabernacle in Orsanmichele became the standard point of reference and it represented the arch-template even in the Quattrocento when preferences switched from the Gothic idiom to the *all'antica* forms. Its scale, design and effusive ornament set the norm for future enshrinements.

There is no precedent or following example of a tabernacle quite like Andrea Orcagna's. In this project, Orcagna attests his talents as painter, sculptor, and architect. Executed in the finest marble and abundantly decorated with inlaid colored and gold-glass panels, the *tempietto* is a monumental free-standing structure, comprised in three levels of decoration, built in the Florentine 'gothic' idiom, and resembling the Duomo's campanile, key-aspects of the cathedral morphology and the inlay Cosmatesque technique. Megan Holmes comprises the very complex nature of this structure in a well-formulated description: 'The familiar tabernacle metaphors of throne, abode, and temple are substantiated through the likeness of the architecture to domed churches, vaulted *ciboria*, eucharistic tabernacles and monstrances, and jeweled reliquaries.'¹

The tabernacle is very friendly for the art historian – on a large relief in the back lies an inscription that explicitly informs us of its authorship: 'Andrea di Cione, Florentine painter, was *archimagister* of this Oratory 1359'. Most discussions regarding the dating consider that the construction of the shrine started earlier in the decade, at around 1352. Before the bronze and marble railing was added in 1366, then followed by the enclosure of the loggia, the tabernacle was more accessible, and, over and above, dashingly impressive to any visitor, having the possibility of approaching it from all four sides.² Around the time of Orcagna's appointment, the interior decoration was also commencing, being assigned to the less influential Florentine guilds.

The architecture of the tabernacle was modeled upon Giovanni Di Balduccio's initial project, as the miniature in the *Libro del Biadaiolo* suggests. In concordance with his predecessor's design, Orcagna constructs his tabernacle upon a quadratic ground plan, enclosed on all four sides, accessible with difficulty to very few and having no liturgical function. What is particular and new at the structure is the addition of a cupola. Its inclusion is very significant if we consider the intimate association between cupola architecture, originating in sanctuaries of the Madonna, and the cult of the Virgin. The cathedrals in Pisa, Siena and Florence all have cupolas and are dedicated to the Virgin. In the same vein, in one of the niches on the façade of Orsanmichele, which was held by the *Arte dei Medici e Speziali*, and contained another miraculous sculpted depiction of the Madonna, the niche's upper part resembles a cupola. However, the incorporation of a cupola may have been prompted by reasons that overpass iconography. By requesting a cupola, the confraternity asserted its financial capacity, the prominence of the cult of the Madonna of Orsanmichele, and, ultimately, Orcagna demonstrated his architect

¹ Holmes, *The Miraculous Image*, 228.

² Nancy Rash Fabbri and Nina Rutenburg, 'The Tabernacle of Orsanmichele in Context', *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 63, No. 3, Sep. 1981, 386. DOI: 10.1080/00043079.1981.10787902

abilities. After this commission, Orcagna the painter becomes Orcagna the architect.¹

Daddi's painted Madonna possesses an 'indexical agency', in Holmes' words, generating the form and structure of the arches that become the physical contours of the panel. The arched opening is also produced on the back of the image by the spectacular sculpted relief of the *Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin*. Megan Holmes considers that this particular relief aims to indicate the 'extraordinary status' of the panel painting. The importance of this relief is poignantly asserted by Orcagna's decision to place his signature here, along the tomb of the Virgin. In the scenography of veiling and unveiling, the angels holding the brocaded relief of the curtain concur to add three-dimensionality to the otherwise flat painting. Through this spatial maneuver, Orcagna aims to activate the lateral view of the miraculous image and overcome the limitations of the two-dimensional representation.² Indeed, this artifice that Orcagna designed has the capacity to bring the image to life, emphatically enhancing the appearance of the supernatural divinity of the Madonna. Such details coherently enunciate the close relationship between the miraculous image and its framing, claiming that a contemporary painting can compete in materiality and power with holy relics. To claim authorship for the gesture, Orcagna includes his own draughtsmanship in this assertion. By naming himself a *pictor* rather than a sculptor, he seeks to align himself to the same art as the author of the miraculous Madonna, who has virtually renewed and reinstated its power through the shrine and reactivating the thaumaturgic capacities.

The Madonna Generating Beauty. The Ambitious Quest of Embellishing Orsanmichele

Without a doubt, the focus of the decoration program at Orsanmichele is the tabernacle designed by Orcagna. However, the whole site stands as first-hand testimony of the ambitious corporate artistic patronage of the *laudesi* confraternity. In the remainder of my essay, I intend to tackle the other decoration commissions that have been conducted inside and outside of Orsanmichele, that echo the power of the miracle-working Madonna. My assumption is that the thaumaturgic image of the Virgin occasioned unconventionally industrious artistic commissions. In terms of cultic efficiency, its power generated tremendous artistic impact; in more mundane terms, the astute devotion at the grain-market generated considerable income to the confraternity administering the cult. More so, the constant implication of the guilds and the Guelf party in the development of the market and oratory prompted more abundant and inventive draughtsmanship from the part of the artists employed. The artistic liberty that we see bestowed at Orsanmichele was a fortunate consequence of the fact that the Church had no authority over the functioning of the confraternity, nor the grain-market and oratory. Seeing opportunity, the Florentine commune gets increasingly involved in the control of the confraternity's finances after mid-fourteenth century, but the deeds exercised by the polity have only a mediating nature and seek to bring the guilds' patronage closer to the artistic investments at Orsanmichele. The main concern of the municipal authority was, most probably, to oversee and control the possible corruption of the captains of the *compagnia*.

Given the centrality of the cult of the Madonna of Orsanmichele, it is my opinion that the construction of the palace structure on top of the modest loggia, and the decoration program could be read as elaborated means of veiling the miracle-working

¹ Gert Freytenberg, *Orcagna's Tabernacle in Orsanmichele, Florence*, with photographs by David Finn, (New York: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 1994), 38-39.

² Holmes, *The Miraculous Image*, 229-230.

image. However, taking into consideration the importance of Marian devotion for Florence, Orsanmichele was viewed as a lively symbol of the city itself. Therefore, the aspect of Orsanmichele weighted considerably on the reputation of the city. The construction of the palace in 1336 was probably determined by the wish to display affluence, combined with matters of utility, given that 'its [present] appearance was a discredit to the city'.¹ In 1338, this civic monument enters another stage of its embellishment, when the twelve most powerful guilds and the Guelf Party are given permission by the government (*sic!*) to decorate the exterior piers of the façade with sculpted images of their patron saints. Beyond aesthetic reasons, these sculptures were also aimed to be a wall of protection for the venerated Virgin inside.²

Orsanmichele was not only the first site where a miracle was performed in the Florentine region, but it was also the first location where revolutions in terms of sculpting technique took form – here, the first free-standing statue, in the literal sense, was conceived and staged in the representation of Donatello's St. Mark. The first *rilievo schiacciato* was also to be encountered for the first time in St. George's representation, in the *predella* of the sculpture executed by the same Donatello. These innovations would have not been possible in any other building in Florence, and according to Artur Rosenauer, the arguments get to be confirmed if we look at the contemporary sculpted decorations of the cathedral and campanile façades. Another feature that is unprecedented is the disposition of the sculptures at a very low height, which offered the viewer an immensely different experience. The novelties that we see instrumented in the populated niches at Orsanmichele were a fortunate consequence of the competition between the guilds, each aiming to surpass the other through its illustrious artistic patronage. The privileged status of Orsanmichele acted as a catalyst that advanced the renewal of the arts within the Florentine environment.³

In the second half of the fourteenth century, the Confraternity of Orsanmichele goes in a slow but impending decline, and so does the cult surrounding the Madonna. After the construction of Orcagna's shrine, the commune got increasingly more involved in the affairs of the *compagnia*, limiting its authority to the maximum extent possible. Rumors about the misconduct of the captains threatened to shadow Madonna's reputation as a miracle-making image.

The last act of recognition that the Florentines directed at the Orsanmichele Virgin was staged at 13th of August 1365, when she was publicly 'adopted by the Republic as special advocate by the voice of all people assembled in the Piazza della Signoria'. This gesture and the implication of the government in the affairs of the confraternity concurred to create the impression that the completion of the oratory of Orsanmichele was owed to the efforts of the commune. In 1367, the grain-market was finally moved to another location and Orsanmichele remained a place of devotion. Later, the enclosure of the Loggias was appointed to the architect Simone di Francesco Talenti.⁴ In 1382 Francesco Sacchetti composed the program of the stain-glass windows and, supposedly, Agnolo

¹ Diane Finiello Zervas, *Orsanmichele a Firenze*, (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 1996), 43.

² Norman, 'The Glorious Deeds of the Commune', 146-147

³ 'In the Sancta Sanctorum in Rome, we read the inscription *Non est in toto sanctorum orbe locus*. An analogous designation seems to apply to Orsanmichele: There is no other place in Florence – or, by implication, in the world – where the origins of modern sculpture are manifest as clearly as in this building.' Artur Rosenauer, 'Orsanmichele: The Birthplace of Modern Sculpture', in Carl Brandon Strehlke (ed.), *Orsanmichele and the History and Preservation of the Civic Monument*, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012), 173-176.

⁴ John Henderson, *Piety and Charity*, 219-223.

Gaddi, Niccolo di Pietro Gerini, Giovanni del Biondo and Lorenzo Monaco designed the cartoons. Through this last commission, the story of the cult of the Madonna was exquisitely told and the final veil of the miraculous image is instantiated.¹

Conclusion

The very powerful cult surrounding the miracle-working Madonna of Orsanmichele generated numerous artistic contributions, and the first notable instance in the chain was Bernardo Daddi's painting. Orsanmichele's special status among all the other sites of devotion, which was controlled by a secular confraternity and sustained through massive civic worship, allowed it to become a location of very highly esteemed artistic display that, most importantly, remained *in situ* up to the present day. Orsanmichele was and stays a unique place of many firsts – first miracle ever performed in Florence, an exceptional blend of sacred and secular and, arguably, the birthplace of modern sculpture. The lavish chain of artistic enterprises, commissioned by the confraternity, the guilds and the commune, were very resourceful votive offerings dedicated the miraculous image of the Virgin, image so strong that it reverberated through the hands of three painters and to animate a design such as Andrea Orcagna's monumental enshrinement.

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¹ Renee Karen Burnam, 'The stained glass windows of the Oratory of Orsanmichele in Florence, Italy' (1988). *Art & Music Histories - Theses*. 2, unpublished PhD. dissertation, Syracuse University https://surface.syr.edu/fia_etd/2/

Tuscan Panels in the National Gallery of Denmark', in Andrea-Bianka Znorovsky and Gerhard Jaritz, *Marian Devotion in the Late Middle Ages. Image and Performance*, Routledge, London & New York, 2022

BIONOTE:

Oana A. STAN is an independent art historian living and working in the Netherlands. Oana has recently worked in the Dutch Institute of Art History in the Hague in the project *RKD Study: Frans Hals and his workshop*. The project resulted the publication of a new catalogue *raisonné* of the oeuvre of Frans Hals, as a collaboration between Claus Grimm and the RKD. Previously, she graduated from her master's degree in Renaissance Studies at Utrecht University, with a thesis on *The Representation of Female Old Masters in Dutch and Flemish Museums*. The dissertation, supervised by prof. Victor M. Schmidt (UU) and prof. Katlijne Van Der Stighelen, consisted of a historiography of the museum practices and policies in the past three decades, taking into consideration the larger context of Second Wave feminism and the propagation of diversity and inclusivity agendas in academic and cultural institutions. Beyond these topics she is interested in architectural history, issues of connoisseurship, fundamental questions regarding art history's methods and is a devotee of the painterly artistic tradition.

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