

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL HUMANIST

LETTER Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), a Florentine philosopher writes to his friend the astronomer Paul of Middleburg that this is a “golden age,” a time of awakening and rebirth, after a thousand years of sleep, following the fall of the Roman Empire. Both men were friends of Federico da Montefeltro, the duke of Urbino (SLIDE 9).

To Paul of Middleburg, 1492

What the poets once sang of the four ages, lead, iron, silver and gold, our Plato in *The Republic* transferred to the four talents of men, assigning to some talents a certain leaden quality implanted in them by nature, to others iron, to others silver and to still others gold. If then we are to call any age golden, it is beyond doubt that age which brings forth golden talents in different places. That such is true of our age he who wishes to consider the illustrious discoveries of this century will hardly doubt. For this century, like a golden age, has restored to light the liberal arts, which were almost extinct: grammar, poetry, rhetoric, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, the ancient singing of songs to the Orphic lyre, and all this in Florence. Achieving what has been honored among the ancients, but almost forgotten since, the age has joined wisdom with eloquence, and prudence with the military art, and this most strikingly in Federigo [Federico], Duke of Urbino, as if proclaimed in the presence of Pallas herself, and it has made his son and his brothers the heirs of his virtue. In you also, my dear Paul, this century appears to have perfected astronomy, and in Florence it has recalled the platonic teaching from darkness into light. In Germany in our times have been invented the instruments for printing books, and those tables in which in a single hour (if I may speak thus) the whole face of the heavens for an entire century is revealed, and one may mention also the Florentine machine which shows the daily motions of the heavens.

James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin, eds., *The Portable Renaissance Reader*. New York: Penguin Books, 1981, p. 79.

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL

HUMANIST

LETTER from Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536), the Dutch humanist, to his friend Thomas More (1478–1535), the English humanist and author of *Utopia*. Erasmus wrote the book *Moriae encomium* (*The Praise of Folly*), a satire that he dedicated to More. In a witty preface, Erasmus explains the pun on the word for folly (*moria*) and the name More (SLIDE 17).

[Paris?] 9 June [1511]

To his friend Thomas More, greetings:

In days gone by, on my journey back from Italy into England, in order not to waste all the time that must needs be spent on horseback in dull and unlettered gossiping, I preferred at times either to turn over in my mind some topic of our common studies or to give myself over to the pleasing recollection of the friends, as learned as they are beloved, whom I had left behind me in England. You were among the very first of these to spring to mind, my dear More; indeed I used to enjoy the memory of you in absence even as I was wont to delight in your present company, that which I swear I never in my life met anything sweeter. Therefore, since I thought that I must at all hazards do something, and that time seemed ill suited to serious meditation, I determined to amuse myself with the Praise of Folly. You will ask what goddess put this into my mind. In the first place it was your family name of More, which comes as near to the word *moria* [folly] as you yourself are far from the reality—everyone agrees that you are far removed from it. Next I suspected that you above all would approve this jeu d'esprit of mine, in that you yourself do greatly delight in jests of this kind, that is, jests learned (if I mistake not) and at no time inspid, and altogether like to play in some sort the Democritus [c. 460–370 B.C.; a Greek philosopher who derided or laughed at people's follies and vanities] in the life of society. Although you indeed, owing to your incredibly sweet and easy-going character, are both able and glad to be all things to all men, even as your singularly penetrating intellect causes you to dissent widely from the opinions of the herd. So you will not only gladly accept this little declamation as a memento of your comrade, but will also take it under your protection, inasmuch as it is dedicated to you and is now no longer mine but yours.

Johan Huizinga, *Erasmus and the Age of Reformation*, New York: Harper & Row, 1957, p. 209.

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL HUMANIST

ORATION by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), a young nobleman with a voracious appetite for knowledge. He studied at the universities of Padua and Paris and at the Platonic Academy in Florence. From his study of Arabic and Hebrew he was led to investigate Asian religion and philosophy. The following excerpt comes from the first part of his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*.

At last it seems to me I have come to understand why man is the most fortunate of creatures and consequently worthy of all admiration and what precisely is that rank which is his lot in the universal chain of Being—a rank to be envied not only by brutes but even by the stars and by minds beyond this world. It is a matter past faith and wondrous one. Why should it not be? For it is on this very account that man is rightly called and judged a great miracle and wonderful creature indeed.

At last the best of the artisans ordained that the creature to whom He had been able to give nothing proper to himself should have joint possession of whatever had been peculiar to each of the different kinds of being. He therefore took man a creature of the world, addressed him thus: “Neither a fixed abode nor a form that is thine alone nor any function peculiar to thyself have we given thee, Adam, to the end that according to thy longing and according to thy judgment thou mayest have and possess what abode, what form, and what functions thou thyself shalt desire. The nature of other beings is limited and constrained within the bounds of laws prescribed by Us. Thou, constrained by no limits, in accordance with thine own free will, in whose hand We have placed thee, shalt ordain for thyself the limits of thy nature. We have set thee at the world’s center that thou mayest from thence more easily observe whatever is in the world. We have made thee neither of heaven nor of earth, neither mortal nor immortal, so that with freedom of choice and with honor, as though the maker and molder of thyself, thou mayest fashion thyself in whatever shape thou shalt prefer. Thou shalt have the power to degenerate into the lower forms of life, which are brutish. Thou shalt have the power, out of thy soul’s judgment, to be reborn into the higher forms, which are divine.”

Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr., eds,
The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956,
pp. 223–25.

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL ARTIST

CONVERSATION between Michelangelo Buonarroti and the poet Vittoria Colonna. The conversation, which took place in Rome, was recorded by the Portuguese painter Francisco de Hollanda in his *Four Dialogues* (1547–49).

And smiling, she said: I much wish to know, since we are on the subject, what Flemish painting may be and whom it pleases, for it seems to me more devout than that in the Italian manner.

Flemish painting, slowly answered the painter, will, generally speaking, Signora, please the devout better than any painting of Italy, which will never cause him to shed a tear, whereas that of Flanders will cause him to shed many; and that not through the vigor and goodness of the painting but owing to the goodness of the devout person. It will appeal to women, especially to the very old and the very young, and also to monks and nuns and to certain noblemen who have no sense of true harmony. In Flanders they paint, with a view to deceiving sensual vision, such things as may cheer you and of which you cannot speak ill, as for example saints and prophets. They paint stuffs and masonry, the green grass of the fields, the shadow of the trees, and rivers and bridges, which they call landscapes, with many figures on this side and many figures on that. And all of this, though it pleases some persons, is done without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion, without skillful selection or boldness and, finally, without substance or vigor. Nevertheless there are countries where they paint worse than Flanders. And I do not speak so ill of Flemish painting because it is all bad but because it attempts to do so many things well (each one of which could suffice for greatness) that it does none well.

Robert Klein and Henri Zerner, eds., *Italian Art, 1500–1600: Sources and Documents*, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1989, p. 33.

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL ARTIST

JOURNAL ENTRY Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) describes a procession in Antwerp. This procession may have been similar to a **Triumph** (SLIDE 5). Albrecht Dürer was a German painter, humanist, and art theorist whose use of the popular graphic media, won him fame. (SLIDE 13, Lesson Plan: Printmaking, p. 191)

On the Sunday after our dear Lady's Assumption I saw the great procession from the Church of Our Lady at Antwerp, when the whole town of every craft and rank was assembled, each dressed in his best according to his rank. And all ranks and guilds had their signs, by which they might be known. In the intervals great costly pole-candles were borne, and their long old Frankish trumpets of silver. There were also in the German fashion many pipers and drummers. All the instruments were loudly and noisily blown and beaten.

I saw the procession pass along the street, the people being arranged in rows, each man some distance from his neighbour, but the rows close one behind another. There were the goldsmiths, the painters, the masons, the broiderers, the sculptors, the joiners, the carpenters, the sailors, the fishermen, the butchers, the leatherers, the clothmakers, the bakers, the tailors, the shoemakers—indeed workmen of all kinds, and many craftsmen and dealers who work for their livelihood. Likewise the shopkeepers and merchants and their assistants of all kinds were there. After these came the shooters, with guns, bows, and cross-bows; and the horsemen and foot-soldiers also. Then followed a great crowd of the lord's magistrates. Then came a fine troop all in red, nobly and splendidly clad. Before them, however, went all the religious orders and the members of some foundations very devoutly, all in their different robes.

A very large company of widows also took part in this procession. They support themselves with their own hands and observe a special rule. They were all dressed from head to foot in white linen garments, made expressly for the occasion, very sorrowful to see. Among them I saw some very stately persons. Last of all came the chapter of Our Lady's Church, with all their clergy, scholars, and treasures. Twenty persons bore the image of the Virgin Mary with the Lord Jesus, adorned in the costliest manner, to the honour of the Lord God.

In this procession very many delightful things were shown, most splendidly got up. Wagons were drawn along with masques upon ships and other structures. Among them was the company of the prophets in their order and scenes from the New Testament, such as the Annunciation, the Three Holy Kings [magi] riding on great camels and other rare beasts, very well arranged; also how Our Lady fled to Egypt—very devout—and many other things, which for shortness I omit. At the end came a great dragon, which St. Margaret and her maidens led by a girdle; she was especially beautiful. Behind her came St. George with his squires, a very

goodly knight in armour. In this host also rode boys and maidens most finely and splendidly dressed in the costumes of many lands, representing various saints. From beginning to end the procession lasted more than two hours before it was gone past our house. And so many things were there that I could never write them all in a book, so I let it well alone.

James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin, eds., *The Portable Renaissance Reader*, New York: Penguin Books, 1981, pp. 228–30.

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL ARTIST / TRAINING

LETTER outlining a young painter's studies, written by the master painter Francesco Squarcione of Padua to the master painter Guzon. Guzon's son will study with Squarcione.

October 30, 1467, Padua

Be it known and clear to whoever may read this writing that master Guzon, painter, has agreed with master Francesco Squarcione, painter, that the latter is to teach the former's son, Francesco, and namely the principle of a plane with lines drawn according to my method, and to put figures on the said plane, one here and one there, in various places on the said plane, and place objects, namely a chair, bench, or house, and get him to understand these things, and teach him to understand a man's head in foreshortening by isometric rendering, that is, of a perfect square underneath in foreshortening, and teach him the system of a naked body, measured in front and behind, and to put eyes, nose, mouth and ears in a man's head at the right measured places, and teach him all these things item by item as far as I am able and as far as the said Francesco will be able to learn, and as far as my knowledge and basic principle will go and always keep him with paper in his hand to provide him with a model, one after another, with various figures in lead white, and correct these models for him, and correct his mistakes so far as I can and he is capable, and this is agreed by both sides for four months from now, and he is to give me half a ducat every month as my fee [detailed payment provisions, including food provided] and if he should damage any drawing of mine the said Guzon is required to pay me its full worth, etc.

And I Francesco Squarcione wrote this with my own hand.

Creighton E. Gilbert, ed., *Italian Art, 1400–1500: Sources and Documents*, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1992, p. 34.

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL ARTIST / TRAINING

CONTRACT for an artist's apprentice. This contract is between the Florentine artist Neri di Bicci and his apprentice Cosimo di Lorenzo.

March 1, 1456

I record that on the above day I, Neri di Bicci, hired as a disciple in the art of painting Cosimo di Lorenzo, for a year beginning on the same day and ending on the same day in 1457, with these agreements and procedures, that the said Cosimo must come to the shop at all times and hours that I wish, day or night, and on holidays when necessary, to apply himself to working without any time off, and if he takes any time off he is required to make it up. And I Neri must give the said Cosimo for his salary in the said year 18 florins, paying him every three months: and this was agreed with the said Cosimo on the above day in my house and so I have made this record at his desire with this agreement.

Creighton E. Gilbert, ed., *Italian Art, 1400–1500: Sources and Documents*, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1992, p. 31.

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL ARTIST /PATRON

CONTRACT between the artist and the patron. This is a contract between Domenico Ghirlandaio, the Florentine painter, and the patron Francesco di Giovanni Tesori for the commission of an altarpiece titled *The Adoration of the Magi*.

Be it known and manifest to whoever sees or reads this document that, at the request of the reverend Messer Francesco di Giovanni Tesori presently Prior of the Spedale degli Innocenti at Florence, and of Domenico di Tomaso di Curado Ghirlandaio, painter, I, Fra Bernardo di Francesco of Florence, Jesuate Brother, have drawn up this document with my own hand as agreement contract and commission for an altar panel to go in the church of the above said Spedale degli Innocenti with the agreements and stipulations stated below, namely:

That this day 23 October 1485 the said Francesco commits and entrusts to the said Domenico the painting of a panel which the said Francesco has had made and has provided; the which panel the said Domenico is to make good, that is, pay for; and he is to colour and paint the said panel all with his own hand in the manner shown in a drawing on paper with those figures and in that manner shown in it, in every particular according to what I, Fra Bernardo, think best; not departing from the manner and composition of the said drawing; and he must colour the panel at his own expense with good colours and with powdered gold on such ornaments as demand it, with any other expense incurred on the same panel, and the blue must be ultramarine of the value of about four florins the ounce; and he must have made and delivered complete the said panel within thirty months from today; and he must receive as the price of the panel as here described (made at his, that is, the said Domenico's expense throughout) 115 large florins if it seems to me, the above said Fra Bernardo, that it is worth it; and I can go to whomever I think best for an opinion on its value or workmanship, and if it does not seem to me worth the stated price, he shall receive as much less as I, Fra Bernardo, think right; and he must within the terms of the agreement paint the predella of the said panel as I, Fra Bernardo, think good; and he shall receive payment as follows—the said Messer Francesco starting from 1 November 1485 and continuing after as is stated, every month three large florins. . . .

And if Domenico has not delivered the panel within the above said period of time, he will be liable to a penalty of fifteen large florins; and correspondingly if Messer Francesco does not keep to the above said monthly payment he will be liable to a penalty of the whole amount, that is once the panel is finished he will have to pay complete in full the balance of the sum due.

Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 6.

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL

ARTIST /PATRON

LETTER from an artist asking his patron for money. This letter is from Fra Filippo Lippi to Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici. Giovanni was often out of Florence, and Lippi tried to keep in touch with him by letter (SLIDE 4).

I have done what you told me on the painting, and applied myself scrupulously to each thing. The figure of Saint Michael is now so near finishing that, since his armour is to be of silver and gold and his other garments too, I have been to see Bartolomeo Martelli: he said he would speak with Francesco Cantansanti about the gold and what you want, and that I should do exactly what you wish. And he chided me, making out that I have wronged you.

Now, Giovanni, I am altogether your servant here, and shall be so indeed. I have had fourteen florins from you, and I wrote to you that my expenses would come to thirty florins, and it comes to that much because the picture is rich in its ornament. I beg you to arrange with Martelli to be your agent in this work, and if I need something to speed the work along, I may go to him and it will be seen to.

If you agree . . . to give me sixty florins to include materials, gold, gilding and painting, with Bartolomeo acting as I suggest, I will for my part, so as to cause you less trouble, have the picture finished completely by 20 August, with Bartolomeo as my guarantor. . . . And to keep you informed, I send a drawing of how the triptych is made of wood, and with its height and breadth. Out of friendship to you I do not want to take more than the labour cost of 100 florins for this: I ask no more. I beg you to reply, because I am languishing here and want to leave Florence when I am finished. If I have presumed too much in writing to you, forgive me. I shall always do what you want in every respect, great and small.

Valete [Be well]. 10 July 1457
Fra Filippo the painter in Florence.

Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 4.

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL ARTIST /PATRON

LETTER from a patron concerning the welfare of an artist. In this letter, Philip the Good writes his accountants, regarding Jan van Eyck's pension (SLIDE 2).

We have heard that you do not readily verify certain of our letters granting life pension to our well beloved equerry painter, Jan van Eyck, whereby he cannot be paid said pension; and for this reason, he will find it necessary to leave our service, which would cause us great displeasure, for we would retain him for certain great works with which we intend henceforth to occupy him and we would not find his like more to our taste, one so excellent in his art and science.

Wolfgang Stechow, ed., *Northern Renaissance Art, 1440–1600: Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966, p. 4.

JOURNAL ENTRIES Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) comments on Lady Margaret of Austria, a patron and collector with a changeable nature.

Margaret sent after me to Brussels and promised she would speak in my behalf to King Charles, and has shown herself quite exceptionally kind to me; and I sent her my engraved *Passion*. . . .

I have been to Lady Margaret's, and I let her see my Kaiser and would have presented it to her, but she disliked it so much that I took it away again. And on Friday Lady Margaret showed me all her beautiful things, among them I saw about 40 small pictures in oils, the like of which for cleanness and excellence I have never seen. And there I saw other good works by Jan [Van Eyck] and Jacopo [de' Barbari]. I asked my lady for Jacopo's little book, but she had promised it to her painter; then I saw many other costly things and a fine library. . . .

In all my doings, spendings, sales, and other dealings in the Netherlands, in all my affairs with high and low, I have suffered loss, and Lady Margaret in particular gave me nothing for what I gave her and did for her.

Roger Fry, ed., *Dürer's Record of Journeys to Venice and the Low Countries*, New York: Dover, 1995, pp. 48, 91, 95.

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL

FAMILY

DISCOURSE ON MANNERS Giovanni della Casa, a papal nuncio, probably wrote this passage around 1555 for his young nephew, Annibale Rucellai, to instruct him in the manners of the perfect gentleman.

To help you understand how to behave I must first teach you that your conduct should not be governed by your own fancy, but in consideration of the feelings of those whose company you keep. . . . For this reason it is a repulsive habit to touch certain parts of the body in public, as some people do. . . . Again, when you have blown your nose, you should not open your handkerchief and inspect it, as though pearls or rubies had dropped out of your skull. Such behavior is nauseating and is more likely to lose us the affection of those who love us than to win us the favor of others. . . . It is not polite to scratch yourself when you are seated at table. You should also take care, as far as you can, not to spit at mealtimes, but if you must spit, then do so in a decent manner. . . . We should also be careful not to gobble our food so greedily as to cause ourselves to get hiccups or commit some other unpleasantness. . . . It is also bad manners to clean your teeth with your napkin, and still worse to do it with your finger, for such conduct is unsightly. It is wrong to rinse your mouth and spit out wine in public, and it is not a polite habit, when you rise from the table, to carry your toothpick either in your mouth, like a bird making its nest, or behind your ear. . . . It is also unmannerly to sprawl over the table or to fill both sides of your mouth so full with food that your cheeks are bloated. And you must do nothing to show that you have found great relish in the food or the wine, for these are the customs of the tavern and the alehouse. . . . I do not think it right to offer food from one's own plate to anyone else, unless the person who offers it is of much more exalted rank, in which case it would be a mark of honor for the other. If both are of the same rank, it is rather a presumption of superiority for one of them to offer his food to the other, and sometimes the tidbit might not be to his taste. . . . No one must take off his clothes, especially his lower garments, in public, that is, in the presence of decent people, because this is not the right place for undressing. . . . You should neither comb your hair nor wash your hands in the presence of others, because—except for washing the hands before going in to a meal—such things are done in the bedroom and not in public. . . . Again, you must not appear in public with your nightcap on your head or fasten your hose when other people are present. . . . Anyone who makes a nasty noise with his lips as a sign of astonishment or disapproval is obviously imitating something indecent, and imitations are not too far from the truth.

James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin, eds., *The Portable Renaissance Reader*; New York: Penguin Books, 1981, p. 340.

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL FAMILY

LETTER from Friedrich Behaim, a fourteen-year-old German student, to his mother.

13 October, 1578

Filial love and devotion, dear Mother. When you are well and hardy, it gives me great joy to hear it. I am also still in good health.

Dear Mother, know that although the first quarter is not yet over, I have been unable to get by on the gulden you gave me [for my personal use], and I have spent an additional half-gulden. I would still like to make do on a gulden per quarter in the future, but I need many things for which I must spend money. So I ask you to send me as much as you will, and I will use it [accordingly] for my needs.

Also, my everyday trousers are full of holes and hardly worth patching; I can barely cover my rear, although the stockings are still good. Winter is almost here, so I still need a [new] lined coat. All I have is the woven Arlas, which is also full of holes. So would you have my buckram smock lined as you think best? I have not worn it more than twice.

Oertel's cooking declines daily. Seldom if ever do I enjoy a meal, for the food he is serving now is thoroughly unclean, especially the meat, which is spoiled. Also, my throat is so swollen that I can barely swallow. I need some warm mead for it.

Nothing more for now. I would like to have written you sooner, but I have not had the time because exams were held last week and I had to study.

Greet all the household for me. Please write me when Sigmund Oertel and Appolonia Loffelholz are getting married. 13 October, 1578.

Y[our] L[oving] S[on]
Friedrich Behaim

Steven Ozment, trans., *Three Behaim Boys: Growing Up in Early Modern Germany*, 1990, pp. 105.

RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL FAMILY

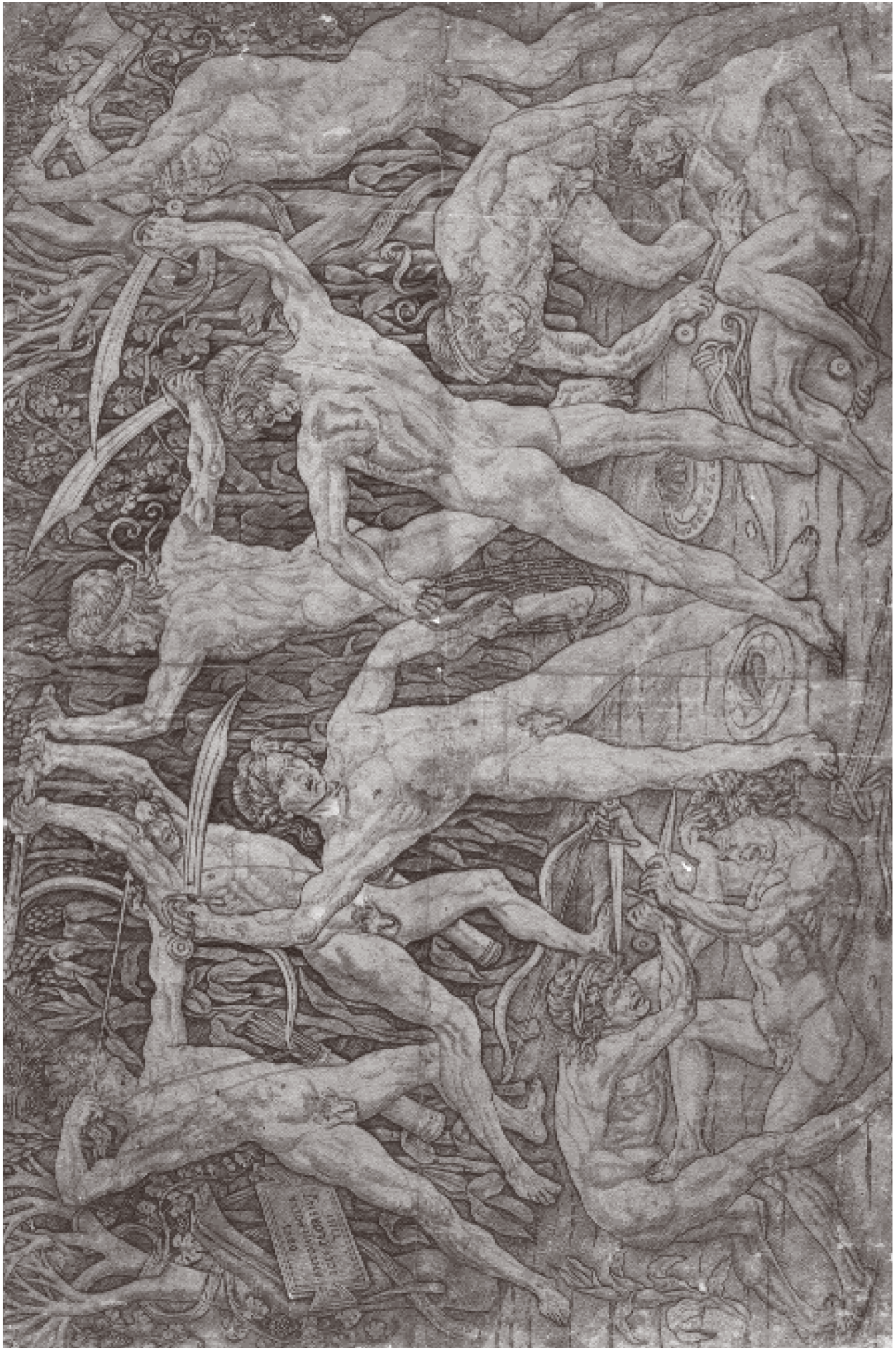
LETTER from Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi to her son on the subject of his sister's marriage.

In the name of God. 24 August 1447

Dearest son, in the last few days I have received your letter of the 16th of July, which I will answer in this one.

And first I must tell you how by the grace of God we have arranged a marriage for our Caterina to the son of Parente di Piero Parenti. He is a young man of good birth and abilities and an only son, rich and twenty-five years of age, and he has a silk manufacturing business. And they take a small part in the government, as a little while ago his father was [an office holder] in the College. And so I am giving him one thousand florins of dowry, that is, five hundred florins that she is due in May 1448 from the Fund, and the other five hundred I have to give him, made up of cash and trousseau, when she goes to her husband's house, which I believe will be in November, God willing. And this money will be partly yours and partly mine. If I hadn't taken this decision she wouldn't have been married this year, because he who marries is looking for cash and I couldn't find anyone who was willing to wait for the dowry until 1448, and part in 1450. So as I'm giving him this five hundred made up of cash and trousseau, the 1450 [money] will be mine if she lives until then. We've taken this decision for the best because she was sixteen and we didn't want to wait any longer to arrange a marriage. And we found that to place her in a nobler family with greater political status would have needed fourteen or fifteen hundred florins, which would have ruined both of us. And I'm not sure it would have made the girl any happier, because outside the regime there's not a great choice, and this is a big problem for us. Everything considered, I decided to settle the girl well and not to take such things into account. I'm sure she'll be as well placed as any girl in Florence, because she'll have a mother and father-in-law who are only happy making her happy. Oh and I haven't told you about Marco yet, [Caterina's] husband, he's always saying to her, "If you want anything ask me for it." When she was betrothed he ordered a gown of crimson velvet for her made of silk and a surcoat of the same fabric, which is the most beautiful cloth in Florence. He had it made in his workshop. And he had a garland of feathers and pearls made for when she goes to her husband's house. And he's having a rose-colored gown made, embroidered with pearls. He feels he can't do enough having things made, because she's beautiful and he wants her to look even more so. There isn't a girl in Florence to compare with her and she's beautiful in every way, or so many people think. May God give them his grace and good health for a long time, as I wish.

Cesare Guasti, ed., *Lettere di una gentildonna fiorentina del secolo XV ai figliuoli*, Florence: Sanson, 1877.



RENAISSANCE SOURCE MATERIAL

TEMPLATE FOR ARTISTS

ENGRAVING

BATTLE OF THE NAKED MEN,

LAST QUARTER OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

ANTONIO POLLAIUOLO

Florentine, 1429–1498

Engraving: 15 5/8 x 23 1/4 in.

Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1917 (17.50.99)

The publication of this engraving made history because it compressed a whole course of artistic anatomy into one picture. Because prints were affordable and easy to transport, this one became a template for many of the poses depicted in paintings of the time. Antonio Pollaiuolo conceived of the body as a powerful machine, and he liked to display its parts, its knotted muscles and taut sinews. According to Vasari, Pollaiuolo was the first artist to strip the skin off cadavers in order to investigate the muscles and bones. It is believed that he made wax models of the flayed cadavers and then bent them into various positions so that he could draw the body in motion.

In this engraving, in fact, the ten figures engaged in violent actions look more flayed than naked. It has been suggested that *reliefs* on Roman sarcophagi (stone coffins) may have inspired the arrangement of the background and the figures, which reach, stride, strike, stoop, and fall. Some are mirror images of others. They appear stiff and frozen, because Pollaiuolo illustrates all the muscle groups at maximum tension. Later artists understood and rendered the subtler workings of the muscles, but, as Hyatt Mayor, a past curator of prints at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, writes, “Pollaiuolo was discovering man with the eagerness of the navigators who were then exploring the shores of the expanding world. [He] tried to chart nothing less than the totality of man’s muscles, in the age when the Italian cartographers were trying to map the daily discoveries of harbors and rivers” (Hyatt Mayor, *Artists and Anatomists*, MMA, 1984, p. 50).

Antonio Pollaiuolo and his brother Piero ran a large and successful workshop in Florence, which made prints, sculpture, paintings, and liturgical objects like embroidered vestments, as well as domestic goldsmith work. The word *pollo* in Italian means “chicken,” and, as their name indicates, their father was a poulterer.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

THOUGHTS: Individual; society; anatomy; human figure in motion; engraving; printing

COMPARE SLIDES 8, 15, 24, 25 (gesture);

SLIDES 12, 13, 16, 18 (human figure); SLIDE 13 (print)

LESSON PLANS: Drawing the Human Figure, p. 121; Contrapposto Pose, p. 123;

Gesture, p. 125