

# *The 2012 Josephine Waters Bennett Lecture: The Eighteenth-Century Invention of the Renaissance: Lessons from the Uffizi\**

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*This essay explores the role that the eighteenth-century Uffizi gallery played in the invention of the Renaissance. Under the Habsburg-Lorraine rulers, and especially during the reign of Grand Duke Peter Leopold (r. 1765–90), changes to the Medici collections and the gallery's organization transformed an early modern cabinet of curiosities, paintings, and antiquities into a space in which a historical narrative of art, inspired by rereadings of Giorgio Vasari's Lives, became visible in a building he designed. A succession of Uffizi personnel was increasingly preoccupied with how to see renaissance, and more specifically Tuscan rinascita, in the collections. The struggles between the director Giuseppe Pelli Bencivenni and his vice-director Luigi Lanzi highlight how different understandings of the Renaissance emerged in dialogue with antiquarianism and medievalism. At the end of the eighteenth century the Uffizi would definitively become a museum of the Renaissance to inspire new forms of historical writing in the age of Michelet and Burckhardt.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is a special pleasure to discuss the Renaissance with its broadest and most devoted audience, namely, all of us who as teachers and scholars continue to refine and expand the meaning of why the Renaissance matters, and convey our passion for this subject to future generations of students and the general public. For quite a few years I have asked myself why a historian trained in medieval and Renaissance studies also fell in love with

My thanks go first to Elizabeth Cropper for the invitation to give this lecture at the Renaissance Society of America in Washington, DC, in 2012, and to Erika Suffern for making the experience so enjoyable. Carole Paul and Catherine Soussloff offered crucial advice in the early phases of developing this project. Long ago, Peter Miller encouraged me to explore the eighteenth-century history of museums further; more recently, Renato Pasta has shared his far greater knowledge of Pelli Bencivenni with me. I want especially to thank two historians who have most influenced my understanding of the Italian Renaissance: Katharine Park, who first introduced me to the subject as an undergraduate and inspired my interest in cabinets of curiosities; and Randolph Starn, whose own passion for the history of art and museums encouraged me to pursue this subject in graduate school. Thanks also to Lynn Hunt and Roger Hahn, for showing a Renaissance historian why the eighteenth century matters; and my colleague Jim Sheehan for sharing his knowledge of the modern art museum.

the eighteenth century. In many respects, it seems a curious, even unlikely choice, since those arbiters of Enlightenment who strongly insisted on their own modernity iconoclastically erased much of what came before them, leaving behind an impoverished account of preceding centuries whose stereotypes persist even today. And yet, during the decades in which I have pursued the Italian Renaissance in relationship to the field of early modern Italian history I have come to realize that the unfavorable view of the eighteenth century by a number of medieval and Renaissance historians is in fact a myth perpetuated by our tendency to look only at certain strands of the Enlightenment, and not at the broader intellectual and cultural history of this period that did so much to bring both fields of scholarship into existence. Put a different way, I chose to study the Renaissance and the eighteenth century together because, for a historian of Italy, these two moments exist not in antipathy but, much like the relationship between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, as part of a perpetual dialogue about continuities as well as moments of transition and change.

An early encounter with Eric Cochrane's *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries* helped to shape my perspective on the long history of the Italian Renaissance, and especially the role of nostalgia in the creation of historical sensibilities.<sup>1</sup> In his memorable account of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, filled with lively vignettes of people whose hopes, dreams, and sorrows best embodied the second age of Medicean Florence, Cochrane passionately argues for the importance of "putting aside the customary barriers between specialized fields of historical study and taking account of all aspects of thought and activity. . . in each succeeding generation."<sup>2</sup> His late Italian Renaissance was an open portal, inviting readers to step beyond the sixteenth century while taking its lessons with them. Cochrane's account of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, the forgotten centuries that followed the golden age of Cosimo il Vecchio and Lorenzo de' Medici, beautifully renders the sense of the past that haunted early modern Florentines. It continues to be a point of reference for my own sense of the Janus faces of the Italian Renaissance, whose explicit dialogue with the past laid the groundwork for how subsequent generations would perceive its meaning. Eighteenth-century Italy played a singular role in these developments that has transformed my appreciation of the Italian Renaissance and, more importantly, my understanding of how the subject itself emerged.

<sup>1</sup>Katy Park may recall using this book in a seminar on Italy in the Age of Galileo at Wellesley College in 1983–84 that first introduced me to the idea of the late Renaissance.

<sup>2</sup>Cochrane, 1973, xiii–xiv.

The Renaissance is a peculiar historical artifact. I can think of few broadly defined fields of scholarship in which the most important synthesis of the subject remains a book published in 1860. Even today many of us continue to teach the Italian Renaissance in explicit dialogue with Jacob Burckhardt's masterful and evocative book: I still use my mother's copy that she read as an undergraduate at Cornell University around 1960, as testimony to its enduring value. Scholars argue with Burckhardt but they still learn from him, as well as from Jules Michelet, Walter Pater, Aby Warburg, Hans Baron, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and all the other larger-than-life figures in the pantheon of scholars who wrote the Renaissance into existence. There is obviously no single unified response to the question of what first inspired their passion for Renaissance Italy, but some years ago I decided to get to know Burckhardt and Michelet better, as a first step toward an answer. I learned many fascinating things about the lineages of scholarship and connoisseurship, and about the competing visions of the political origins of modernity that inspired them: there is, by now, a considerable body of literature on this subject.<sup>3</sup> But I also discovered that tourism and the experience of the museum was one of the essential preconditions to the nineteenth-century invention of the Renaissance. The great historians and art historians of this formative period insisted on the significance of the Renaissance because they traveled and looked at objects while reading and reflecting on history, and wrote about the relationship among these different experiences. In this respect, Francis Haskell was right to insist that representations of history and the making of history are never far apart.<sup>4</sup> The historiography of the Italian Renaissance offers an important lesson on how the disciplines of history and art history emerged together.

Over time scholars have largely chosen to ignore that the making of Burckhardt's career was not *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860), but his bestselling guidebook published five years earlier, *The Cicerone: A Guide to the Enjoyment of Works of Art in Italy* (1855).<sup>5</sup> With the exception of some allusive references by Lucien Febvre and Haskell, scholars have also not paid attention to the process by which Michelet's vision of the Renaissance — outlined in his famous lectures at the Collège de France in the 1840s — took shape not only in his study, but as a result of traveling to Italy, and walking repeatedly through the Louvre (fig. 1). There he saw not only the profusion of Italian paintings in the gallery but also a curious sculpture exhibit called the Museum of the Renaissance, displaying two of

<sup>3</sup>This literature is discussed in detail in Findlen, 2002.

<sup>4</sup>Haskell, 1993.

<sup>5</sup>Burckhardt, 1855; Tauber.



FIGURE 1. Print made by James Baylis Allen, after Thomas Allom, *The Louver*, ca. 1840, etching and engraving on chine collé, 280 x 188 mm. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Michelangelo's *Captives*, that opened to the public in 1835.<sup>6</sup> Michelet visited both the gallery and the exhibit on multiple occasions in 1842: what he saw inspired additional lectures on what he called, using the language of early nineteenth-century French curators, the "Monuments of the Renaissance." He subsequently described the importance of this experience in the pages of his book, entitled *The Renaissance* (1855), that appeared in the same year as Burckhardt's *Cicerone*. "Go into the Louvre," he tells his readers, inviting them to compare the paintings of Fra Angelico and Leonardo: "In the large gallery, on the left, you have the old world, the new one on the right. Opposite this ancient mysticism, in the pictures of da Vinci, shines the spirit of the Renaissance, at its most fierce, sharp, and restless."<sup>7</sup> There is no question that his Renaissance was in the museum.

My investigation of Burckhardt and Michelet as museum-goers writing history from objects sets the stage for the history of the Uffizi that is the focal point of this essay. It contains a cast of characters lifted directly from the pages of Cochrane's *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries*: the prickly and quarrelsome directors of the Uffizi gallery, Giuseppe Querci (1769–73), Raimondo Cocchi (1773–75), and especially Giuseppe Pelli Bencivenni (1775–93), as well as Pelli Bencivenni's arch-nemesis Luigi Lanzi (1732–1810) (fig. 2), the Uffizi's first vice-director and author of the influential *Pictorial History of Italy*, first published in 1795–96 and enlarged into the definitive edition of 1809.<sup>8</sup> In the late eighteenth century they began the process of inscribing the Renaissance in the museum. While scholars cannot attribute this development to them alone, since their innovations were directly inspired by the transformation of the museum in other cities such as Rome, Dresden, Düsseldorf, and Vienna, the centrality of the Uffizi for generations of Grand Tourists made their innovations of the 1770s through the 1790s well known and widely discussed at the international level.<sup>9</sup> The recent work of Italian art historians who have made available an enormous quantity of edited documents from which to write the history of the Uffizi and have produced a series of important volumes on this subject now makes it possible to reconstruct the role of this important gallery in the making of the Renaissance in the late eighteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Without these

<sup>6</sup>[Anon.]

<sup>7</sup>Michelet, 7:83. See Febvre, 1973 and 1992; Haskell, 1993; Bullen.

<sup>8</sup>Lanzi, 1968.

<sup>9</sup>Haskell, 1979; Bjurnström; Meijers; Pomier; Gaetgens and Marchesano, esp. 1–51.

<sup>10</sup>For the history of the Uffizi, a good starting point is Heikamp, 1963, 1964, and 1969; Barocchi, 1982; *Gli Uffizi*; Acidini Luchinat; Findlen, 2012. Literature dealing more specifically with the late eighteenth-century gallery will be cited throughout this essay.



FIGURE 2. Giovanni Boggi, *Portrait of Luigi Lanzi*, ca. 1800. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

developments, the Renaissance effect that so captivated Burckhardt and Michelet in the modern art museums of the early nineteenth century would not have been so transparently self-evident, and perhaps would have inspired a rather different kind of history.

It should surprise no one that I consider the idea of the Italian Renaissance to be a peculiarly museological phenomenon. I have spent a good portion of my career studying museums and collecting as one of Italy's distinct cultural legacies. An important element of my work has concerned demonstrating how the museum was an ancient concept deeply embedded in the Renaissance consciousness, whose revival and reinvention facilitated practices of collecting and networks of collectors between the mid-fifteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries, and ultimately encouraged

the idea of the museum as a civic institution as well as family patrimony.<sup>11</sup> Yet I have been equally intrigued with how museums not only emerge from history but also generate historical narratives. In the museum, researchers stand inside a scholarly magic lantern that illuminates an image of the past. What vision of the Italian Renaissance does it project for its public?

In turning to these issues, I have been guided by the excellent work of the historians and art historians who have preceded me — Julius von Schlosser, Francis Haskell, Silvio Bedini, Krzysztof Pomian, Paola Barocchi, Arthur MacGregor, Giuseppe Olmi, Adalgisa Lugli, Horst Bredekamp, Patricia Fortini Brown, and Patricia Falguières, to name but a few<sup>12</sup> — but also by Burckhardt, whose curiously obscure essay on “The Collector” (“Die Sammler”), published posthumously in 1898 one year after his death, reflected his own understanding of the role of Renaissance Italy in the creation of this archetypal figure.<sup>13</sup> During the past decades the emergence of the interdisciplinary field of museum studies has given this subject added impetus as a form of public history that plays a role in exhibit design, curatorial training, and a more general awareness of the history of the museum as an institution.<sup>14</sup> The history of museums offers rich terrain for historians committed to understanding the meaning of institutions in shaping public narratives about the past. Fundamentally, I consider the modern art museum to be largely responsible for the invention of the Italian Renaissance, not as the lived experience of a society that existed (with or without this term), but as a crystallizing force in defining a cultural moment for posterity. The question is exactly how this occurred.

## 2. *RENAISSANCE*: A FRENCH WORD FOR THE GRAND TOUR

Let us leave behind Michelet’s Paris and Burckhardt’s Basel, and turn instead to the final chapter of Cochrane’s book, the Florence of Grand Duke Peter Leopold (r. 1765–90). The age of the Medici was long over even if their memories, their histories, their palaces, villas, and galleries filled with generations of collectibles remained. In 1765 the death of Francis Stephen propelled his eldest son Joseph II to the imperial throne in Vienna and his second son, eighteen-year-old Peter Leopold, into the position of Grand Duke of Tuscany. Unlike his father, Peter Leopold did not rule at a distance.

<sup>11</sup>Findlen 1989, 1998, 2000, and 2004.

<sup>12</sup>I refer readers to the bibliographies in my earlier publications as well as encouraging anyone just getting to know the history of early museums and collecting to begin with MacGregor and Impey; Pomian.

<sup>13</sup>Burckhardt, 1898.

<sup>14</sup>Starn, 2005 and 2007.



FIGURE 3. Print made by Paolo Fumagalli, after F. W. Maritz, *Veduta dei Regii Uffizi di Firenze presa da Lungo Arno*. Florence, ca. 1820, etching and aquatint, 229 x 185 mm (image only). © Trustees of the British Museum.

He would remain in Florence until his brother's death made him the next emperor in 1790. During these crucial decades he would preside over a wholesale reinvention of the Uffizi gallery (fig. 3).<sup>15</sup> His own Tuscan renaissance included the invention of the historical Florentine Renaissance.

<sup>15</sup>On the reign of Peter Leopold, in addition to Cochrane, 1973, see Wandruszka; Diaz; Contini and Parri; Baldacci. On Peter Leopold's role in shaping the Uffizi, see Spalletti.





FIGURE 4. Johann Zoffany, *Tribuna degli Uffizi*, 1772–77. © The Royal Collection 2010, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

In 1765 the Uffizi, a building designed by Giorgio Vasari in 1560 and executed by Bernardo Buontalenti in 1581, had been in existence for almost two hundred years. Grand Duke Francesco I and his brother Ferdinando I designated the L-shaped gallery of its upper floor as a space in which to house precious objects, especially in the famed Tribuna completed by Buontalenti in 1589, satirized by Thomas Patch and famously depicted by Johann Zoffany between 1772 and 1774 (figs. 4 and 5).<sup>16</sup> The Medici, their custodians, and ultimately their antiquarians added to the stockpile of precious objects in the gallery and increasingly demonstrated a willingness to show them to a well-heeled public by the late seventeenth century. But the Uffizi was by no stretch of imagination the museum that one sees today, since neither paintings nor the Italian Renaissance were its focal point. In 1737 Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici, sister and heir of the last Medici Grand Duke Gian Gastone, defined the conditions under which she would transfer her family's patrimony, including the "galleries, paintings, statues, libraries,

<sup>16</sup>Millar.

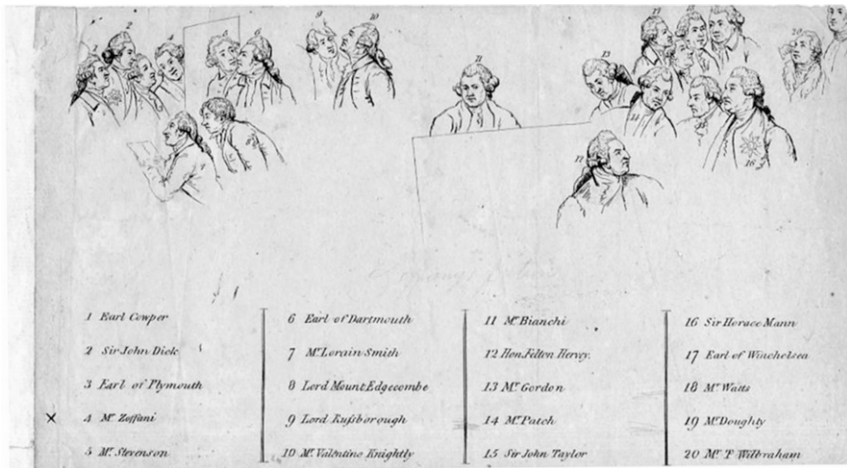


FIGURE 5. After Johann Zoffany, *Key to the 22 Principal Figures in Zoffany's Painting of the Tribuna of the Uffizi, including the Artist Himself*, ca. 1778–1820, etching, 155 x 254 mm. © Trustees of the British Museum.

and jewels, and other precious things,” to the Duke of Lorraine, enjoining Francis Stephen “to preserve them with the express condition that nothing which is for the ornament of the state, for the use of the public, and to attract the curiosity of foreigners will be taken away from the Capital and State of the Grand Duchy.”<sup>17</sup> This carefully worded agreement, known as the Family Pact (*Patto di Famiglia*), permitted the new Grand Duke, no longer a Medici, to hold these things in trust on behalf of his state. It made the Medici collections a distinctively Tuscan patrimony.

Yet in the middle of the eighteenth century visitors to the Uffizi, quite ironically, were unlikely to see more than a handful of Tuscan paintings or sculptures in the gallery. This considerable artistic corpus had not been the focal point of Medici collecting during the preceding centuries since their preferences were decidedly more contemporary than the Quattrocento — let alone the largely neglected Trecento or virtually unknown Duecento — and equally devoted to Flemish and Venetian painting when they cared for painting at all.<sup>18</sup> Their love of exotic and intricately worked objects filled the gallery with beautiful examples of the best baubles that foreign artisans

<sup>17</sup>Valentini, 11–12; Ciletti. On the Uffizi's initial years under the Habsburg-Lorraine rulers, see Fileti Mazza, Spalletti, and Tomasello.

<sup>18</sup>Findlen, 2002. An easy way to confirm this impression is to check the acquisition dates of paintings in the Uffizi: see Caneva, Cecchi, and Natali.

and their own workshops and foundry could produce.<sup>19</sup> Vasari's building contained precious little of the *rinascita* of painting and sculpture immortalized in his *Lives*.<sup>20</sup>

Even an attentive reader of Vasari, eager to see the Uffizi through his eyes, found the display of objects in the Uffizi resistant to this kind of interpretation. In the tradition of most princely *Wunderkammern*, the organization of the gallery was responsive to what it housed: not only certain kinds of objects but also the grand duchy's administrative offices, key artisanal workshops, and the armory. Gifts of visiting dignitaries, spectacular gems, artifacts made of semiprecious stones, rare wood and metals, natural and exotic curiosities, and elegant instruments filled the grand ducal cabinet. Visitors walking through the gallery also saw the Medici's famous portrait collection, created in imitation of Paolo Giovio's *musaeum* in Como, coins, ancient and modern sculptures, and paintings whose size often determined their placement — save for the artists' self-portraits bequeathed by Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici in the late seventeenth century that stood apart from other paintings in a special room.<sup>21</sup> The handful of works selected for special presentation in the Tribuna — Zoffany famously reinvented this room to house paintings and sculptures from other parts of the gallery to permit the room to become a viewpoint for everything of note in the museum — included a few important sculptures and paintings such as the Venus de' Medici and Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, but also precious and artisanal objects that were placed in custom-built cabinets that were themselves costly works of art, or aligned on a shelf encircling the room to give the small precious things of the Uffizi their own niche in relation to the walls filled with paintings and the sculptures that were the centerpiece of the Tribuna.<sup>22</sup> Such was the experience of the Uffizi gallery in this era.

Nonetheless, a number of mid-eighteenth-century Grand Tourists claimed to see something that they called the renaissance in the Uffizi. On 4 July 1764 Edward Gibbon completed the first of fourteen visits to the Uffizi during an intense three-week residency in Florence. He arrived with great expectations, having eagerly consumed many of the available guidebooks and travelers' reports that made the Uffizi an obligatory stop on

<sup>19</sup>Berti; Barocchi and Gaeta Bertelà, 1993; Butters; Acidini Luchinat; Conticelli.

<sup>20</sup>Barolsky, 3, observes that there was an exquisite irony in having Vasari's building entomb Vasari's artistic canon. He attributed this result to the nineteenth century. While largely in agreement with Barolsky's wonderful insight (which inspired this project), I would nonetheless argue for a greater role for the eighteenth century in the process.

<sup>21</sup>Fileti Mazza.

<sup>22</sup>Heikamp, 1963 and 1964.

the Grand Tour. While admiring a number of individual pieces, Gibbon expressed a certain disappointment in the effect of the whole: “Moreover, this collection is hardly complete: among the great masters missing, one can count Michelangelo, Correggio, Albani, and Poussin.”<sup>23</sup> He had hoped to find a virtual encyclopedia of the arts and discovered a few important entries missing.

One day later, on 5 July 1764, Gibbon returned for his second visit and proceeded further into the heart of the gallery. This time he received greater satisfaction from what he saw. Gibbon recorded his observations of the fifth room of the gallery in a language that Michelet would surely have understood and appreciated: “Here one sees a series of paintings of the most ancient masters before the renaissance of painting, and one can follow all the steps that this art made until its perfection.”<sup>24</sup> Like Michelet, Gibbon singled out the works of Fra Angelico in the Uffizi to exemplify the pre-Renaissance, contrasting the style and technique with Raphael’s execution of one of his most famous Renaissance portraits, *Julius II*. Yet as he returned to the Uffizi on subsequent visits, Gibbon expressed his frustration at having to work so hard to see this evolution of painting because the Uffizi was so lacking in any sense of history.

Gibbon also faulted the custodians for not seeing the value of separating paintings and other objects by epoch, to improve the experience of studying the ancients and moderns. By contrast, Gibbon found the drawings collection (another legacy of Cardinal Leopoldo) to be organized more precisely to his specifications. He expressed his pleasure at being able to inspect drawings “since Cimabue and Giotto.”<sup>25</sup> Two hundred years after Vasari designed the Uffizi, an English visitor — no casual Grand Tourist but one of the greatest historians of his generation, deeply fascinated with the history of Medicean Florence though he famously preferred to write the history of Rome’s decline and fall — entered the building looking for evidence of Vasari’s *rinascita*. Gibbon did so as a reader of Voltaire who in influential works such as *Le siècle de Louis XIV* (1751) and his *Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations* (1756) described Medicean Florence as one of the golden ages of mankind, a “renaissance of the human spirit” in which civilization and culture reached their apogee.<sup>26</sup>

Had Gibbon joined the Troyes historian Pierre-Jean Grosley (1718–85) in Padua in 1764, he might have commented on the irony of seeing the

<sup>23</sup>Bonnard, 131 (4 July 1764); see also Whitehead, 292, 298, 304–06.

<sup>24</sup>Bonnard, 137 (5 July 1764).

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 147, 153 (10 and 11 July 1764). See Haskell, 2000, 40.

<sup>26</sup>Voltaire, 11:162; *ibid.*, 14:155–56; Ferguson, 21, 91.

Renaissance in the homes of a handful of especially enterprising and historically minded Venetian collectors rather than in Florence's famous gallery. When Grosley visited the sublimely erudite abbé Jacopo Facciolati (1682–1769) — known today for his ambitious works of lexicography culminating in his contributions to the *Totius Latinatis Lexicon* (1688–1768) and his authorship of the most extensive history of the University of Padua — the French visitor remarked enthusiastically on the unusual qualities of Facciolati's collection: "At abbé Facciolati's, this historian of the University of Padua I discussed above, we saw. . . a collection as learned as it is unusual. It's a series of paintings where one finds, in a manner of speaking, the history of painting as it has developed since its renaissance in Europe. . . . In a word, one finds in this collection the same nuances observed by Cicero in the monuments of Greek sculpture. . . . Change the names indicated by Cicero and you have before your eyes the cabinet of Monsignor Facciolati that, from this point of view, offers an infinitely more satisfying and infinitely more interesting glimpse [of the history of art] than the many rich and sumptuous collections that Italy offers, and where, in comparison with this one, one finds nothing, so to speak, but *disjecta membra Picturae* [scattered fragments of paintings]."<sup>27</sup> Like Gibbon, Grosley's pleasure at discovering the Renaissance in the museum emanated from his great appreciation for the relationship between antiquarianism and history. It was the application of these skills to the display of paintings that made the Renaissance visible — though it should be noted that the details of Grosley's description of what he saw reflected a Venetian critique of Vasari, who spent little time describing the work of Byzantine painters whose icons of the Madonna so fascinated Grosley as the starting-point for Facciolati's collection.<sup>28</sup>

Facciolati does not seem to have been the only learned and pious inhabitant of the Venetian Republic to have these historical sensibilities. Contemporaries described the Franciscan architect and mathematician Carlo Lodoli's (1690–1761) desire to create a painting collection that would "show step-by-step the progress of the art of draftmanship from its renewal in Italy until the age of the Titians, Correggios, Buonarottis, and Paolis."<sup>29</sup> In 1742 Lodoli's pupil, the gallant and cosmopolitan Francesco Algarotti (1712–64),

<sup>27</sup>Grosley, 1:164–66. "*Disjecta membra Picturae*" is a delightful paraphrase of Horace, *Satires* 1.4.62: "disiecti membra poetae."

<sup>28</sup>The potential relationship between Byzantine and Italian Renaissance art would be further explored in the work of Raphael Mengs and intrigued the Uffizi vice-director Luigi Lanzi.

<sup>29</sup>Previtali, 210.



FIGURE 6. *Vue d'une partie de la Galerie Royale de Dresde (appelée Galerie interior ou italienne) comme elle étoit à l'an 1830.* Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden Kupferstichkabinett, aquatint. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

advised the Saxon Elector and King of Poland Augustus III to organize the Dresden art gallery around schools to better illustrate the historical developments of the arts. Algarotti encouraged aspiring artists to learn from the history of art by reading Vasari, Borghini, and Baldinucci. With the purchase of one hundred Italian paintings from the d'Este family in 1745, facilitated by the court physician and antiquarian Giovanni Lucovico Bianconi (1717–81), Augustus III made the Dresden gallery one of the best places to see the history of Italian painting outside of Italy (fig. 6).<sup>30</sup>

Yet the quantity of art on display in the Italian cities — in churches, convents, civic buildings and public piazzas, and private palaces — continued to amaze foreign visitors such as Gibbon and Grosley. During an itinerary between Venice, Padua, and Bologna in the fall of 1786, Goethe delighted in seeing what he called “the renaissance of the arts in the

<sup>30</sup>Haskell, 1980, 347–60; Perini; Gauna, 76–77, 136; Anderson; Rossi, 217, 220.

Middle Ages.” This essay will return to this paradox shortly to explore why Goethe’s Renaissance began in sight of the medieval, since he was not alone in making this statement. Goethe examined the Byzantine and Byzantine-influenced materials that so fascinated Grosley, observed the perfection of this renaissance in the works of Mantegna, and felt he witnessed this renaissance come to an end when he encountered the paintings of Guido Reni in Bologna.<sup>31</sup> The tactile nature of history animated his Grand Tour, as it had done for so many who came before him. Italy was filled with the objects of his desire, leading Goethe to describe the great pleasure of being “in conversation with things all day long” as one of the revelations of his journey.<sup>32</sup> Thus, before he had even set foot in Rome, Goethe experienced an entire *renaissance* by touring paintings throughout the Northern Italian cities.

### 3. *RINASCIMENTO*: A TUSCAN REDISCOVERY

During the 1760s the desire to make the renaissance of art an organizing principle of a painting collection, or alternately to do one’s best to see the renaissance of art in collections that did not subscribe to this historical logic, seems to have been an active subject of discussion between collectors and connoisseurs traveling in Italy. It is important to remember that 1764 was the year in which Johann Joachim Winckelmann published his *History of the Art of Antiquity*.<sup>33</sup> Giovanni Gaetano Bottari’s important edition of Vasari’s *Lives* had appeared only a few years earlier, in 1759–60, making it the probable source of both Gibbon’s and Grosley’s readings of Vasari. Bottari (1689–1775) defended Vasari’s decision to champion Tuscany’s, especially Florence’s, special role in the development of the arts. He firmly agreed with Vasari that “painting knew its renaissance from Cimabue and Giotto.”<sup>34</sup> A proud Florentine transplanted to Rome, where he would become the Vatican librarian under Clement XII, he challenged anyone to find a renaissance in their country as glorious and influential as this Florentine moment.

At the same time, Bottari was a strong advocate of recuperating the Christian Middle Ages. He republished Vasari two years after Benedict XIV opened a “Christian Museum” adjacent to the Vatican Library in 1757,

<sup>31</sup>Goethe, 1999, 73; *ibid.*, 58, 98.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 47, 87.

<sup>33</sup>Potts.

<sup>34</sup>Vasari, 1759–60, 1:xvii. On early modern editions of Vasari, see Barocchi, 1984; for a more general discussion of early modern Italian art theory, see Bickendorf; Grasman.

and his fellow Florentine Giovanni Lami completed a dissertation on artists from 1000 to 1300 as part of an escalating critique of Vasari's impoverished vision of the Middle Ages.<sup>35</sup> This work would inspire other scholars, in particular the Franciscan scholar Guglielmo Della Valle (1746–1805), the first great chronicler of Siena's artistic legacy, to document the accomplishments of Cimabue's and Giotto's predecessors and less well-known contemporaries. The eighteenth-century invention of the Florentine renaissance of the arts was predicated on the importance of studying and preserving the Christian Middle Ages.<sup>36</sup> The Venetian delight in its Byzantine heritage found its counterpart in a Tuscan narrative that did not accept Vasari's *rinascita* as the emergence of something radically new, but instead sought to find its roots in the Tuscan painting of the late Middle Ages.

While Bottari exercised his authority as the preeminent librarian of his generation to put the *rinascimento* back in print in Rome, and Gibbon and Grosley went in search of their *renaissance* in the painting galleries of Florence and Padua, the young Grand Duke Peter Leopold and the Uffizi custodians and antiquarians were in the midst of an important discussion about the future of the gallery. In August 1778 the enlightened Tuscan bureaucrat Pelli Bencivenni, appointed director of the Uffizi in 1775, got into a heated argument with his vice-director, the gallery antiquarian and ex-Jesuit Lanzi. Based on his lengthy tutelage in the company of Rome's leading antiquarians, collectors, and medievalists, Lanzi advocated creating a special exhibit in the Uffizi that would bring together "in a single place. . . certain paintings and sculptures of the Middle Ages." While acknowledging that it had been "the most unhappy epoch for the fine arts" compared to "the best centuries," Lanzi nonetheless felt that Tuscany had an important Christian patrimony to preserve.<sup>37</sup> He wanted the Uffizi to become another Christian museum, in imitation of Scipione Maffei's influential *Museum Veronese* (1749), which became the blueprint for the papal *Museo Cristiano* and also inspired a number of private collections of medieval paintings, relics, and artifacts throughout Italy and especially in the vicinity of Rome.<sup>38</sup> Lanzi felt that by separating out and defining the medieval so that

<sup>35</sup>Giovanni Lami's "Dissertazione. . . relativa ai pittori e scultori che fiorirono dal 1000 al 1300," written in 1757 but not published until 1792, is discussed in Previtali, 85. On the rediscovery of the *primitivi*, see also Natali.

<sup>36</sup>On eighteenth-century medievalism, see Cochrane, 1958; Previtali; Bickendorf. See especially Della Valle; Vasari, 1791–94.

<sup>37</sup>Gauna, 79–80 (Luigi Lanzi to Pelli Bencivenni, Rome, 25 August 1778); see also Barocchi and Gaeta Bertelà, 1991.

<sup>38</sup>Bickendorf, 200; Gauna, 20, 40–45.



it would not languish in the shadow of the Renaissance, he would strengthen the vision of both historical epochs.

Pelli Bencivenni vociferously rejected Lanzi's proposal as decidedly un-Florentine. He considered the Christian museum a project best realized in the Eternal City, where the proliferation of sacred art and relics made it an obvious complement to Roman antiquarianism. At the same time, he also indicated his aesthetic disapproval of the medieval, which suggested a real disagreement with the work of Bottari and others to recuperate the epoch that had preceded Vasari's first age of *rinascita*. "A Christian cabinet is truly a Roman thing," he wrote acerbically to his vice-director: "With the system that you describe, two-thirds of every gallery will be a cabinet of this kind, and I will never approve that patchwork of bronzes, ivories, marbles, and paintings stitched together from piece until one reaches 1300."<sup>39</sup> In the midst of their often-fraught negotiations about what the Uffizi should become, as Grand Duke Peter Leopold gave them an unparalleled opportunity to reinvent and expand the gallery, Pelli Bencivenni reminded his vice-director that any history of the arts written in the Uffizi must begin with its most glorious Tuscan moment: the fifteenth century that he and many of his contemporaries considered to be, in the vocabulary of the time, "the golden century" (*secolo aureo*), a *risorgimento*, a *rinascimento*.<sup>40</sup> Pelli Bencivenni certainly envisioned a place for sacred objects — he contemplated the idea of an exhibit called the Cabinet of Images and Sculptures of the Middle Ages — but he would never allow them to displace what he believed to be the core of Tuscany's artistic heritage.<sup>41</sup>

In the preceding decade a succession of directors working for Grand Duke Peter Leopold had begun to alter the contents and presentation of the Uffizi to respond to a desire to see this particular moment from the past more clearly in the present. In 1769 the grand duke gave Giuseppe Querci (d. 1773) the right to requisition artifacts from all other grand ducal collections, and encouraged his desire to catalogue Tuscany's cultural

<sup>39</sup>Cristofani, 94 (Pelli Bencivenni to Lanzi, Florence, 25 August 1778); see also Gauna, 80.

<sup>40</sup>For examples of this vocabulary, see Vasari, 1791–94, 1:213; Lanzi, 1968, 1:5–6, 31, 57; Tiraboschi, 3:224. On the political genesis of the idea of *risorgimento*, see Banti; Riall. Space does not permit a full discussion of the eighteenth-century emergence of the idea of *risorgimento*, so clearly entangled with concepts such as *rinascita* and *rinascimento*, that preceded the Italian Risorgimento of the nineteenth century, but interested readers might wish to look at Bettinelli; as well as the application of these ideas in the work of Lanzi, 1968.

<sup>41</sup>Barocchi, 1982, 1477. I have translated *Gabinetto delle immagini e sculture del Medio Evo* to reflect the common English plural, Middle Ages, though Italian medievalists of the eighteenth century spoke of it in the singular as a "Middle Age."

patrimony in his palaces and villas, and in public buildings. The grand duke gave the Uffizi an entirely different status when he declared it to be the Florentine gallery of painting and antiquities. In short order, over 1,300 paintings exited the Pitti Palace to enter the Uffizi.<sup>42</sup> Many objects that did not fit the new conception of the gallery also exited the Uffizi, consigned to the Wardrobe, to the new science museum — anywhere but the Uffizi.

The Family Pact of 1737 did not require the Habsburg-Lorraine grand dukes to preserve the Medici patrimony in its original location, making its newfound mobility entirely legitimate according to the terms of this agreement. Nor did it prohibit subsequent acquisitions from entering and altering the arrangement of the collections. Yet it was not until the arrival of the new grand duke that the Uffizi staff began to envision the gallery as a *tabula rasa* on which to write the history of the arts. In 1770 Querci encouraged Peter Leopold to acquire noteworthy paintings and sculptures “worthy of being in the Royal Gallery” from private Florentine collections in order to make the Uffizi a true repository of “the rarest Tuscan things.”<sup>43</sup> Gradually the museum ceased to be a cabinet of curiosities and became an important precursor to the nineteenth-century Italian ideal of *beni culturali*, a cultural patrimony held in trust by an early modern state in its principal museum.<sup>44</sup>

In 1773 Raimondo Cocchi (1735–75), Querci’s successor to the position of director and collaborator from his previous position as the gallery antiquarian, became the first person to envision the possibility of creating a room to house the Tuscan school (*scuola Toscana*), specifically citing the writings of Vasari and Baldinucci as his inspiration in reorganizing the paintings collection. He saw it as a project that would honor the Tuscan nation by demonstrating the totality of their contributions to painting and sculpture. Emphasizing the unique impression that this kind of exhibit would make on visitors, Cocchi encouraged Peter Leopold’s ministers to promote his new vision of the gallery: “I don’t know if any sovereign anywhere has ever had the opportunity to have a collection made of a historical series of the art of his own nation,” he wrote in February 1773.<sup>45</sup> Cocchi became the first custodian to realize that the Uffizi could stake a unique claim to possess more examples of Tuscan art than any other

<sup>42</sup>Barocchi, 1983, 90–91; Fileti Mazza and Tomasello, 1999, 36–55.

<sup>43</sup>Fileti Mazza and Tomasello, 1999, 133 (Querci to Peter Leopold, 15 December 1770).

<sup>44</sup>On the history and modern politics of *beni culturali*, see Settis.

<sup>45</sup>Gauna, 80; Fileti Mazza and Tomasello, 1999, 158 (Raimondo Cocchi to Angelo Tavanti, Florence, 13 February 1773); *ibid.*, 76.

eighteenth-century museum by reorganizing the Medici artistic patrimony and making strategic acquisitions from private collections. Pelli Bencivenni would call this new exhibit the Cabinet of Ancient Paintings (*Gabinetto delle Pitture Antiche*) and see it to completion.<sup>46</sup>

While the Cabinet of Ancient Paintings did not materialize until 1780, the idea first emerged almost a decade earlier. Cocchi's proposal provides essential background for the disagreement between Pelli Bencivenni and Lanzi over whether the Uffizi should celebrate the Middle Ages or the Renaissance. During the 1760s and early 1770s conversations between the learned gallery custodians and knowledgeable, well-traveled foreigners such as Gibbon and Grosley — coupled with a keen awareness of museum innovations underway in Dresden and Düsseldorf — stimulated the idea of the Uffizi as a space in which to experiment with new ways to illustrate the history of the arts. Conversations about the Renaissance and the rediscovery and critique of Vasari's *rinascita* inspired an exhibit that fulfilled Gibbon's desire to have the Uffizi make this subject visible. Cocchi envisioned the exhibit as a way to reclaim Tuscan art for Tuscans, immortalizing the cultural magnificence of Medicean Florence in a Habsburg gallery, but the ingredients for this exhibit were equally shaped by the desire of foreign connoisseurs to see the history of Italian art in the Uffizi.<sup>47</sup>

In 1775 Pelli Bencivenni proudly took charge of the Uffizi as its new director. By then it seemed obligatory to inaugurate this appointment with a ceremonial reading of Vasari and Baldinucci, who were fast becoming the official muses of the gallery. It did not take Pelli Bencivenni long to recognize the possibilities of the dormant project first envisioned by Querci and Cocchi. In 1777, one year before his exchange with vice-director Lanzi (also appointed in 1775), Pelli Bencivenni revived Cocchi's proposal for a "new room of the Tuscan school" and began to consider exactly which works of art it should contain.<sup>48</sup> He made this project, along with his catalogue of the gallery's paintings, a top priority and experimented with new ways to declutter the gallery by giving its contents greater focus and clarifying its organization. Successfully rebuffing Lanzi's scheme to make

<sup>46</sup>Pelli Bencivenni discussed his thoughts about this potential new exhibit in his diary, *Efemeridi* (18 October 1777), Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence (hereafter BNCF), N. A. 1050, serie II, vol. 5, 1777, c. 850, as transcribed on: [www.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/pelli/it/progetti.html](http://www.bncf.firenze.sbn.it/pelli/it/progetti.html). See Spalletti, 16. On the importance of his diary, see Capecci; Pasta.

<sup>47</sup>Pelli Bencivenni was the first Uffizi director to recognize how important travelers' accounts of the gallery were to reconstituting its history and meaning: Filetti Mazza and Tomasello, 2003, 19.

<sup>48</sup>Pelli Bencivenni, *Efemeridi* (18 October 1777), BNCF, N. A. 1050 serie II, vol. 5, 1777, c. 850. Also discussed in Filetti Mazza and Tomasello, 2003, 22.

a collection of medieval artifacts the gallery's centerpiece, Pelli Bencivenni insisted on the importance of highlighting those objects that recalled what many nostalgically believed to be Tuscany's most glorious political and cultural moment, that golden century of the Medici.<sup>49</sup>

By 1779 Pelli Bencivenni and Lanzi cautiously reached a *détente*. They found common ground in their desire to give the Uffizi a distinctively Tuscan character through the creation of two adjacent rooms: the Cabinet of Ancient Paintings and Lanzi's pet project, the Cabinet of Modern Bronzes, both of which displayed important examples of fifteenth-century Florentine artistic production. On either side were two other new exhibit spaces: the *Sala di Niobe*, a room celebrating Peter Leopold's restoration of the gallery and its influential position as a collection of antiquities, and as the final exhibit space of the renovated gallery, the loggia containing Etruscan antiquities (fig. 7).<sup>50</sup> During the next few years Pelli Bencivenni and Lanzi requisitioned the works of Florentine painters and sculptors whose presence in the Uffizi was deemed a high priority from locations such as the Pitti Palace, the now-defunct Wardrobe (previously an exhibit space in its own right as the Medici treasury), and the Chamber of Commerce. They persuaded the grand duke to provide them with a budget for strategic acquisitions — something he had considered presumptuous and unwarranted when Querci made a similar request a decade earlier — in order to create a considerable nucleus of Tuscan paintings and sculpture from the homes of declining noble lineages and defunct churches and monasteries, as many religious orders suffered a fate similar to the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773 that precipitated Lanzi's flight from Rome and his search for another career.

Pelli Bencivenni's *Historical Essay on the Royal Gallery of Florence* (1779), his detailed catalogue of the Uffizi and the first to contain a plan of the gallery, failed to capture or fully anticipate these important changes. While celebrating the Medici as the founders and announcing the new organization of the gallery into "distinct cabinets" under Peter Leopold, it did not adequately convey the significance of the new acquisitions, the winnowing of older artifacts, and the wholesale reorganization of the rooms that was then on the verge of completion.<sup>51</sup> Ironically, Pelli Bencivenni's desire to write a comprehensive history of the Uffizi managed to obscure in print a project that was his passionate preoccupation in his daily life as the gallery director.

<sup>49</sup>On the sense of nostalgia for the Medici, see Tribby.

<sup>50</sup>On these developments, see Filetti Mazza and Tomasello, 2003, 95–96; Spalletti, 93.

<sup>51</sup>Pelli Bencivenni, 1779, 1:424.

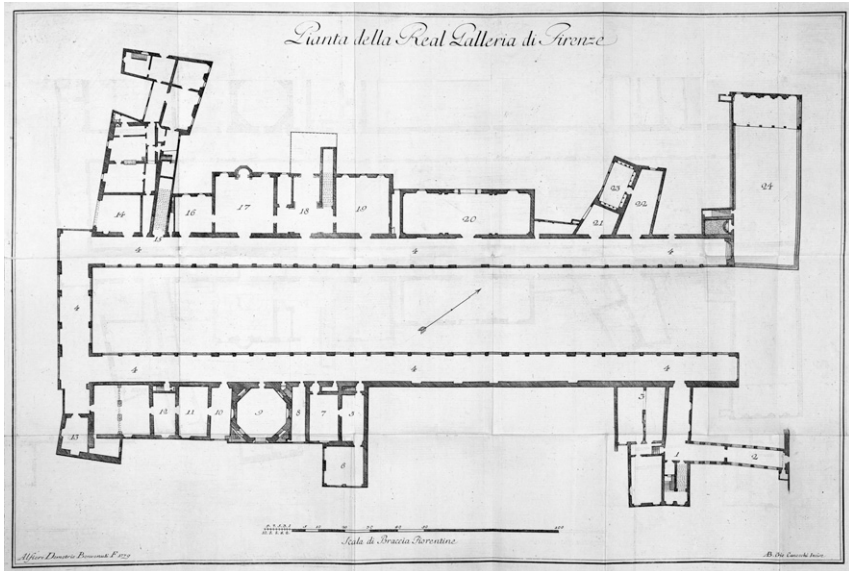


FIGURE 7. Giovanni Canocchi, *Pianta della Real Galleria di Firenze*, engraving, in Giuseppe Pelli Bencivenni, *Saggio istorico della Real Galleria di Firenze*. Florence, 1779. Courtesy of the Art and Architecture Library, Stanford University.

By contrast, Lanzi's *The Royal Gallery of Florence Enlarged and Reorganized by Command of His Most Serene Highness the Archduke, Grand Duke of Tuscany* (1782) — published by his most important Florentine patron Angelo Fabroni in a lengthy issue of the *Giornale de' letterati di Pisa* — provided an elegant and absorbing interpretation of the changes that his boss, the ever diligent and painfully sincere bureaucrat Pelli Bencivenni, had carefully supervised but had been unable to explain well (fig. 8). Lanzi pointedly reminded readers that Vasari was the “author of the great building of the Uffizi.”<sup>52</sup> He drew their attention to the restoration of Vasari's staircase as the entrance to the renovated gallery, filled with Medici busts to remind visitors of their role in the historical gallery that had now been eclipsed by Peter Leopold's improvements. He demonstrated how removing arms, armor, instruments, and artisanal objects doubled the size the gallery, providing adequate space to create a deliberate narrative of the progress of the arts that brought visitors from Vasari's staircase to those rooms demonstrating his history of painting and sculpture, “step by step, not in words but in deeds, not described but drawn and colored.”<sup>53</sup> Lanzi

<sup>52</sup>Lanzi, 1982, 11. Lanzi's contributions to the Uffizi are discussed further in Gregori.

<sup>53</sup>Lanzi, 1982, 69.

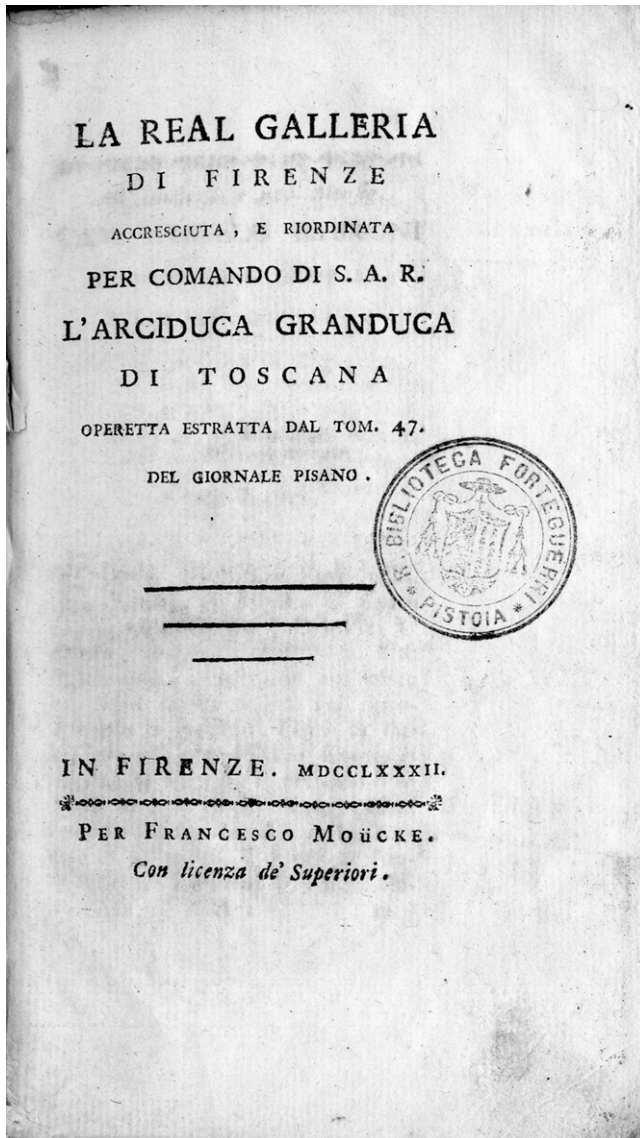


FIGURE 8. Luigi Lanzi, *La Real Galleria di Firenze accresciuta, e riordinata per comando di S. A. R. Arciduca Granduca di Toscana*. Florence, 1782. Courtesy of the Biblioteca Forteguerriana, Pistoia.

subsequently described the journey from the Cabinet of Ancient Painting and the Cabinet of Modern Bronzes to the famous juxtaposition of the Venus de' Medici and Titian's *Venus of Urbino* in the Tribuna as a passage

that fulfilled the promise of Algarotti's description of Venetian painting rivaling the beauty of Greek sculpture.<sup>54</sup> Even in his catalogue of the Florentine gallery, Lanzi cleverly managed to suggest that the apogee of a tour of the Uffizi was not its Tuscan possessions.

Unlike Pelli Bencivenni, Lanzi expressed no personal nostalgia for this Tuscan past, though he developed a connoisseur's understanding of its value as a museum artifact that acknowledged the cultural politics of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany. His goal was to celebrate his patron, Grand Duke Peter Leopold, as the founder of a quintessential modern and innovative gallery. One can readily understand Pelli Bencivenni's blinding fury when he opened the most recent issue of Fabroni's journal to discover that his subordinate had stolen his thunder without having the courtesy to let the director know that he was writing a guide to capture the new experience of the gallery. Pelli Bencivenni carefully enumerated all the faults of Lanzi's catalogue, but no one besides the director seemed to be concerned.<sup>55</sup> And so it was that a Roman antiquarian who cared deeply about the Middle Ages became the most articulate spokesperson for a new vision of the Florentine Renaissance.

#### 4. READING VASARI IN THE UFFIZI

By 1782 Lanzi recognized the futility of making the Uffizi into a Christian museum of the Middle Ages. He ruefully acknowledged that he had envisioned this project from Rome with little understanding of the possibilities in Florence. During the brief period in which he worked onsite with Pelli Bencivenni, Lanzi boldly appropriated and transformed the original plan of an exhibit of the Tuscan school, hoping to expand this category to include examples of Florentine, Pisan, and Sienese painting and sculpture that preceded Cimabue to continue the revision of Vasari. When Lanzi suggested to the grand duke that the Uffizi should become a "museum of ancient painting," he gave this project a new name that reflected his vision of the Florentine Renaissance, no longer simply a demonstration of how Tuscans painted across the centuries but a more precisely delimited exhibition of pictorial antiquity in which Tuscany played a distinctive role.<sup>56</sup> In May 1782 Lanzi encouraged Peter Leopold to support the creation of "a series, following the order of Vasari" in the Cabinet of Ancient Painting. He rightfully argued that it was something that Florence

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>55</sup>Spalletti, 91–92; Fileti Mazza and Tomasello, 2003, 100.

<sup>56</sup>Gauna; Rossi.

could do better than any other city, including Rome, where individual collectors had a taste for “ancient paintings” but the city lacked both the quantity of artifacts and the quality of patronage to make this a focal point for the Roman museum scene.<sup>57</sup> Only four years earlier, Lanzi had tried to convince Pelli Bencivenni that Florence should imitate Rome. Now he used his knowledge of Roman collecting to clarify why Florence should embrace its renaissance.

For two years Lanzi walked through the Uffizi, rereading Vasari and other writers who contributed to the nascent history of the arts, inspecting the contents and arrangement of the gallery with these criteria in mind. He did not hesitate to voice his dissatisfaction with what he saw, writing directly to the grand duke rather than working with Pelli Bencivenni to reconfigure the collection. Why was a great painting by Fra Angelico — perhaps even the one Gibbon earlier admired — in the corridor, where it could easily be missed? Who had had the temerity to place Donatello’s *St John the Baptist* “among the Etruscan urns”?<sup>58</sup> It was time to clean house. Lanzi boldly began to envision the Uffizi as a singular site of historical experimentation that would challenge Roman and German efforts to define historical epochs, and rewrite history itself with Tuscan ingredients.

In the new Uffizi, for the first time, Lanzi saw his renaissance, or, to use his preferred term, *risorgimento*.<sup>59</sup> Yet he hoped that the clarifying exercise of writing history through art would eventually recuperate his beloved Christian Middle Ages, whose legacy faced so many challenges in his own time. Shortly after completing this reorganization of the Uffizi, Lanzi left Florence, anticipating the advice of Guglielmo Della Valle, the Siennese editor of the 1791–94 edition of Vasari’s *Lives*, that the best way to redo Vasari was to revisit his itinerary.<sup>60</sup> Lanzi’s travels of the 1780s filled his notebooks with material for his *Pictorial History of Italy*, whose first volume appeared as a guidebook to Florentine and Siennese painting in 1792, to be followed by a complete edition dealing with five schools of Italian painting in 1795–96, and the definitive version in 1809. The notes on Tuscan painting and sculpture also served as a blueprint to encourage Peter Leopold to make further acquisitions for his gallery. The *Pictorial History of Italy* was a vast virtual museum built upon Lanzi’s experience of art, books,

<sup>57</sup>See Lanzi’s *relazione* to Peter Leopold (16 May 1782), as described in Spalletti, 71; see also Lanzi, 2002, xxiv.

<sup>58</sup>Lanzi’s *relazione* to Peter Leopold (27 January 1780), in Lanzi, 2002, xxiv.

<sup>59</sup>As indicated in the full title of Lanzi’s work: *Storia pittorica della Italia dal risorgimento delle belle arti fin presso al fine del XVIII secolo*.

<sup>60</sup>Vasari, 1791–94, 1:xi.



tourism, and, of course, museums.<sup>61</sup> It was the making of his reputation and the reason the Uffizi vice-director is remembered, rather than the director who worked, day in and day out, with the actual materials of the gallery.

And what of Pelli Bencivenni? In 1784 he finally completed his *Catalogue of Paintings in the Royal Gallery*, though it would not be published in his lifetime.<sup>62</sup> His satisfaction with the project of describing Tuscan *rinascita* shines through on every page: his inventory was a hard-earned accomplishment that the changing politics of the gallery consigned to obscurity. Yet in the early years of his directorship, the Uffizi director developed a vision of the gallery as an eighteenth-century museum of the Italian Renaissance. In his *Letter to a Dilettante about Some of the Grand Duke's Paintings*, written around 1777, a few years before the inauguration of the Cabinet of Ancient Painting, Pelli Bencivenni guided an imaginary visitor through his Uffizi with Vasari's *Lives* in hand. He reveled in the pleasure of rereading Vasari. "From Vasari one also learns" was a phrase constantly on his lips.<sup>63</sup> In contrast to Lanzi's critical but begrudging admiration of Vasari, Pelli Bencivenni saw himself as the direct heir of the artist and critic who designed the building in which he worked. Walking through the gallery, the encounter with works by painters belonging to Vasari's *rinascita* inspired him to take visitors through successive chapters of Vasari's *Lives*, contemplating his words in front of images. Lanzi's 1782 guidebook made reading Vasari, or any text besides his own, secondary to the experience of seeing the history of art in the museum, but Pelli Bencivenni perceived the gallery as a place in which to engage Vasari in dialogue.

In his *Letter to a Dilettante* Pelli Bencivenni sought to convey the magnitude of the changes then underway in the gallery. He proudly advertised the still-unfinished Cabinet of Ancient Paintings, describing it as "a new magnificent showroom that will be entirely dedicated to the Tuscan school," and discussed the role that it would play in transforming the Uffizi into a full-fledged demonstration of "the birth and progress of art."<sup>64</sup> In anticipation of these changes, he invited his tourist to gaze upon the works of Fra Angelico, recently arrived in the gallery from their original

<sup>61</sup>The most comprehensive studies of Lanzi's *Storia pittorica della Italia* are Gauna; Rossi; see also the critical introduction to Lanzi, 1968; Gregori. Recently, Donata Levi has published critical editions of Lanzi's notebooks that allow us to follow his itinerary and observations of the art of Northern and Central Italy: for understanding his approach to Tuscan art, see especially Lanzi, 2002.

<sup>62</sup>Pelli Bencivenni, 2004.

<sup>63</sup>Pelli Bencivenni, 2005, 165. There are many other examples of his use of Vasari throughout this fascinating text.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 161.

location in the monastery of San Marco, and proudly showed them other new acquisitions such as paintings by Andrea del Sarto. Recognizing the lacunae in the Uffizi's holdings, Pelli Bencivenni lamented the relative absence of any paintings by Leonardo da Vinci, save for an unfinished Madonna, a head of an angel purchased by Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici, and the much-discussed *Medusa*. Seeing Leonardo was best done in Paris and Milan, Pelli Bencivenni reminded his readers, but Florence had many other treasures that would bring Vasari's words to life, including the three Raphaels of the Tribuna, each of them illustrating a different moment in the development of this painter's style. In his Vasarian reading of Raphael learning successively from the "diverse styles" of Perugino, Leonardo, and Michelangelo, Pelli Bencivenni showed himself to be a gallery director who understood the powerful effect of the culminating exhibit in the Uffizi.<sup>65</sup>

Had Pelli Bencivenni published his *Letter to a Dilettante* to accompany his *Historical Essay on the Royal Gallery of Florence*, he might have been able to claim credit for simultaneously offering an objective and subjective account of the Uffizi. He was deeply interested in the travelers' experience of the gallery and even contemplated writing a sentimental journey through the museum in imitation of Laurence Sterne.<sup>66</sup> Once again, however, he found himself eclipsed by his vice-director, who improved upon his description of the presence of Leonardo in the Uffizi, seizing the opportunity to claim a dramatic rediscovery of a forgotten Florentine masterpiece hidden in plain sight. In his 1782 catalogue Lanzi publicly attributed a Flemish painting of *Medusa* done around 1600 to Leonardo. Thus, one of the most vivid anecdotes in Vasari's *Lives* — of a young Leonardo brilliantly painting a disturbing, Medusa-like image on a wooden shield — found concrete expression in a gallery painting that would inspire many descriptions, including Walter Pater's 1869 meditation on "the *Medusa* in the Uffizi."<sup>67</sup> It would subsequently become a central chapter in Pater's *Studies on the Renaissance* (1873), offering a concrete example of how late eighteenth-century museology provided the foundation for nineteenth-century historical writing.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 157 (Raphael), 167–68 (Leonardo).

<sup>66</sup>On Pelli Bencivenni's fascination with the traveler's experience, see Pelli Bencivenni, *Efemeridi* (6 October 1776), BNCF, N. A. 1050, serie II, vol. 4, c. 674; and on the inspiration provided by reading Sterne's *Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), see *Efemeridi* (1 August 1788), serie II, vol. 16, c. 3158; also Fileti Mazza and Tomasello, 2003, 110–11.

<sup>67</sup>Lanzi, 1982, 132; Turner, 116–17, 123.

While the *Letter to a Dilettante* recorded the dream of the Renaissance, the *Catalogue of Paintings* documented its lived reality at a crucial moment of transition, including the systematic acquisition of paintings that had been explicitly “praised by Vasari.”<sup>68</sup> Pelli Bencivenni’s satisfaction with all he had accomplished — including the grand duke’s final approval of the new arrangement of the paintings in 1784 — led him to proclaim that if only Rome, Venice, and Bologna would imitate what Florence had done in its gallery, the world would come to Italy to see what he tellingly described as “a complete visual history of the renaissance of painting.”<sup>69</sup> Long before Lanzi defined his *Pictorial History of Italy* as a general history of painting that would improve upon all those particular histories of the arts written since Vasari, Pelli Bencivenni had begun to speculate about the value of presenting “a general Italian school” of painting to visitors in the museum.<sup>70</sup> These discussions show the process by which both the director and vice-director of the Uffizi, for very different reasons, came to the conclusion that glorifying and preserving Tuscany’s artistic patrimony was a first step in writing a history of Italy through its art that made *rinascimento* the glorious centerpiece. Their mutual experiment, indeed their competition to create history in the gallery, led them to this important conclusion.

With Pelli Bencivenni’s abrupt dismissal as director in 1793, his quest to become the engineer of Florentine *rinascimento* came to an end. His words about the meaning of this enlightened renaissance inspiring the spirit of his age languished in his *Letter to a Dilettante*, *Catalogue of Paintings*, and other projects that never saw the light of day. In 1790 Lanzi returned to Florence from his prolonged Vasarian journey and was promptly appointed royal antiquarian as Peter Leopold departed for Vienna to succeed his brother as emperor. Highly favored by Peter Leopold’s son, Ferdinando III (r. 1790–1801), Lanzi handpicked Pelli Bencivenni’s successor Tommas Puccini (1749–1811), another Roman antiquarian (though with a Tuscan pedigree, since he hailed from Pistoia).<sup>71</sup> During the 1790s Puccini reorganized the Uffizi gallery according to the blueprint laid out in Lanzi’s

<sup>68</sup>Pelli Bencivenni, *Efemeridi* (3 October 1782), BNCF, N. A. 1050, serie II, vol. 10, c. 1874<sup>v</sup>. This is in reference to the acquisition of a painting Pelli Bencivenni described as Andrea del Sarto’s *Pietà di Luce* from the convent of San Piero a Luco in the Mugello; probably the *Lamentation over Christ* (ca. 1524), now in the Palazzo Pitti.

<sup>69</sup>Pelli Bencivenni, 2004, 297. Pelli Bencivenni’s crucial formulation is “un’intera storia parlante del rinascimento della pittura in Italia.” On the idea of *storia parlante*, see Haskell, 1993.

<sup>70</sup>Pelli Bencivenni, 2005, 153.

<sup>71</sup>On Puccini’s collaboration with Lanzi, see Barocchi, 1983, 1:122–28; Rossi, 228–29; Pasquinelli.

*Pictorial History*. Lanzi, of course, approved of these changes while Pelli Bencivenni, demoted to administrative obscurity after his fall from grace and marginalized from subsequent decisions that would further transform the Uffizi, fumed silently. By 1796, the year in which the first complete edition of the *Pictorial History of Italy* appeared, even the Etruscan vases had been removed from the gallery to make room for more paintings such as Leonardo's *Adoration of the Magi*.<sup>72</sup>

*Le rinascenti arti*, as Lanzi called them in his *Pictorial History of Italy*, now defined the gallery, and yet Lanzi and Puccini still were not satisfied with the effect they wished to achieve.<sup>73</sup> Having perfected Tuscan *rinascita* while constantly questioning its pejorative view of the Tuscan Middle Ages, drawing inspiration from the work of their Sienese friend Della Valle — who did more than anyone to recuperate the prehistory of the Florentine Renaissance in relation to the artistic legacy of the medieval Italian communes, churches, and monasteries of Central Italy — they now provided another point of comparison: Puccini's creation of two Venetian rooms in the Uffizi that opened in 1797–98.<sup>74</sup> In his *Pictorial History of Italy* Lanzi specifically cites Antonio Maria Zanetti's *On Venetian Painting and Public Works of Venetian Masters* (1771) as a primary model for how to write the history of Italian painting.<sup>75</sup> Puccini helped him transform Zanetti's narrative of Venetian art into an exhibit that subverted the uniqueness of the Tuscan rooms he created two decades earlier with Pelli Bencivenni. And yet even that stalwart Florentine civil servant Pelli Bencivenni had delighted in the prospect of a chain of museums throughout Italy displaying the best examples of their artistic patrimony to create a complete visual history of the Renaissance.

While never able to dislodge entirely the Tuscan Renaissance from its place of honor, Lanzi continued to be committed to reading Vasari's *Lives* against the grain, performing a historical archaeology of the Renaissance in the company of his close associates. Puccini helped Lanzi broaden the horizons of its geography. Della Valle accompanied Lanzi to see the "subterranean walls" of Santa Maria Novella in search of paintings that

<sup>72</sup>Barocchi, 1982, 1493. Puccini had Leonardo's *Adoration of the Magi* transferred, probably in 1793–94: *ibid.*, 1492.

<sup>73</sup>Lanzi, 1968, 1:5.

<sup>74</sup>Barocchi, 1982, 1492.

<sup>75</sup>Lanzi, 1968, 1:7, 10, explicitly cites Antonio Maria Zanetti's *Della pittura veneziana e delle opere pubbliche de veneziani maestri* (1771) and Girolamo Tiraboschi's *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1772–82) as his sources of inspiration as well as the Tuscan tradition of critiquing Vasari embodied by Bottari and Della Valle.

predated the work of Cimabue and Giotto, vertically extending his *rinascimento* into a more distant past. Together they created a genealogy of the arts that broadly considered developments in Northern and Central Italy from the eleventh through the sixteenth century. Della Valle eloquently observed in his *Sieneſe Letters* (1782–86): “Time is a long ſcale and the centuries are its ſteps; from Raphael one deſcends to Cimabue juſt as from Cimabue one aſcends to Raphael.”<sup>76</sup> Their creative ſenſe of the paſt expanded Vaſari’s *rinascita* into an artistic *risorgimento* that defined the centuries that Burckhardt, as an art hiſtorian turned hiſtorian, would alſo make the ſubject of his *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. As for Puccini, his unpublished *Dialogue with the Lives of Vaſari* teſtifies to the fundamental importance of continuing to walk through the gallery haunted by the ghoul of its architect.<sup>77</sup>

How did Vaſari’s building come to houſe Vaſari’s Renaissance? There were many different ways to take up Chriſtian von Mechel’s call to write a “viſible hiſtory of art” on the walls of a late eighteenth-century gallery.<sup>78</sup> The Florentine verſion of this project made the idea of the Renaissance, and the looſely defined but deeply theorized conceptual vocabulary that accompanied it, a much-diſcuſſed ſubject by patrons, cuſtodians, antiquarians, hiſtorians, and connoiſſeurs who came to Florence in the age of the Grand Tour. In the Uffizi the Renaissance was in the making as it emerged from a world of objects in motion, whoſe reorganization reflected a new understanding of the role of art, culture, and museums.

A century and a half earlier, a ſeventeenth-century Roman reader of Vaſari and theorist of the Baroque gallery, the phyſician and antiquarian Giulio Mancini (1558–1630), defined ancient paintings as “thoſe of the renaissance century.”<sup>79</sup> Yet this term of art did not become common currency for his generation, or even for thoſe immediately thereafter. Inſtead, it was a world of enlightened Catholic antiquarians who cared deeply about the Middle Ages that revived the idea of the Renaissance in negotiating the function of a brand-new inſtitution — the modern art gallery — with men ſuch as Pelli Bencivenni, who were products of a far more ſecular and European-wide Enlightenment that found its language and genealogy in the *renaissance* of Voltaire and Gibbon rather than the

<sup>76</sup>Della Valle, *Lettere ſaneſi* (1782–86), as quoted in Gauna, 82.

<sup>77</sup>Barocchi, 1983, 1:125–28.

<sup>78</sup>Chriſtian von Mechel, *Verzeichniſſ der Gemälde der Kaiſerlich Königlich Bilder Galerie im Wien* (1783), in Gaechtgenſ and Marcheſano, 48.

<sup>79</sup>Mancini, 1:146: “quelle del ſecolo riſaſcente.” See Findlen, 2002; Gage.

*rinascimento* of Bottari and Lanzi.<sup>80</sup> The great cataloguer of late eighteenth-century Roman museums, Ennio Querino Visconti (1751–1818), acknowledged the special role of the eighteenth-century Tuscans in defining what he, too, described as “the renaissance of the arts,” even as he made the Capitoline Museum the centerpiece of the experience of seeing the Roman past.<sup>81</sup> When Burckhardt and Michelet toured the European art museums of the early nineteenth century and saw their Italian Renaissance — no longer attributable only to Florence but encompassing all of Italy from its late Middle Ages through the Venetian sixteenth century — they walked in the footsteps of this fascinating cast of characters who do indeed deserve a place of honor in Cochrane’s forgotten centuries and in our understanding of the historiography of the Italian Renaissance.

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

<sup>80</sup>The relationship between Catholic Enlightenment and the arts is discussed by Bickendorf; Rossi. On the institutional transformation of the Uffizi, see Findlen, 2012.

<sup>81</sup>Ennio Querino Visconti, *Due discorsi inediti* (1785), as quoted in Gauna, 174.

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