Pietro Perugino (1450-1523) and the Practice of Reuse: Redefining Imitazione in the Italian Renaissance

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PIETRO PERUGINO (1450-1523) AND THE PRACTICE OF REUSE:
REDEFINING *IMITAZIONE* IN THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Pietro Perugino’s oeuvre is characterized by the reappearance of figures and motifs replicated through the reuse of cartoons. Perugino’s deliberate self-plagiarism, despite being rooted in quattrocento compositional methods, exhibits an exploitation of the reproductive nature of the cartoon. While this practice allowed him to develop an efficient design process, the results of this imitation endowed Perugino’s work with a formulaic quality, as was first noted by Giorgio Vasari in his Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors and Architects (1568). Significantly, in the sixteenth century, theorists revised the concept of imitation to incorporate not only the notion of replication,
but emulation as well. An examination of Perugino’s reproductive practices alongside this revised view of imitation elucidates the nature of Vasari’s criticism, ultimately revealing why the critic placed him among artists of the quattrocento, rather than that of the cinquecento.
The Theory of *Imitazione*

The complexity of the Renaissance understanding of imitation has its roots in discussions of the literary arts in ancient Greece. Despite our modern biases against the repetitive nature of imitation, which implies a lack of originality, in the Renaissance it held a vital pedagogical role and was viewed as an important element in the conception of works of art. In Greek philosophy, imitation or *mimesis* was defined simply as the representation of another thing. Nature was the primary model and imitation was discussed predominantly within the contexts of education and poetics.¹ A child, for instance, learns behaviors through observing those of his parents; or to use a Platonic example, a warrior learns virtue (*virtù*) through viewing images of or hearing stories about men exemplifying heroic behavior.² The association of *virtù* with imitation underscores the fact that ancient philosophers understood *mimesis* not only as an exact replication, but also as an ideal representation. In this instance, reproduction is based on an ideal concept, which is created by a corpus of stored memories. In *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle stated that all knowledge comes from experience and that each incident of sensory perception is recorded as a memory. These memories coalesce over time and become a universal, or ideal, representation that has the potential to be realized


in material form. Perhaps the most famous example of this phenomenon is found in the anecdote recounting the creation of a painting by the Greek artist Zeuxis. When the people of Croton commissioned Zeuxis to create a painting of Helen, he first took the best physical attributes from different women, then reconfigured their myriad features into an image reflecting his concept of the ideal woman. The Zeuxian compositional method makes clear that mimesis was defined as imitation in the same sense that Quintilian’s concept of emulation is a re-presentation of the model based on an ideal concept in the mind. As many have observed, Quintilian’s De institutio oratoria informed much sixteenth century writing on art including treatises on imitation.

In his treatise, Il primo libro del trattato delle perfette proporzioni (1567), art theorist and sculptor Vicenzo Danti (1530-1576) prescribed a method of creating art that reflected both types of imitation. He divides imitation into two separate, but related concepts: ritrarre and imitare. Ritrarre is defined as a mode of imitating which results in making “something exactly as another thing is seen to be.” In simpler terms, ritrarre is to copy. Ritrarre also has value as a means of improving the artist’s judgment through the constant copying of both nature and works of art by great ancients and modern

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masters. Danti believed that if the natural world were perfect (which it is not), \textit{ritrarre} would be an adequate means of imitation. However, because of the imperfections inherent in nature, Danti cites a second and more difficult mode of imitation: \textit{imitare}.

He defines \textit{imitare} as imitating things as they are meant to be, that is without any flaws or blemishes. Therefore, \textit{imitare} is perceived as a more elevated form of representation, one that unites the skilled hand with the critical mind. When discussing Danti’s definition of imitation, art historian David Summers asserts that \textit{imitare} is not merely transcribing things as they appear (\textit{ritrarre}) or patterning one’s work after another, but “a kind of reality perfected by art.”\footnote{Summers, 279.}

Although theorists writing more than a century before Danti cited Zeuxis and his famed portrait of the ideal woman, they nonetheless attempted to prescribe a method for creating art that reflected an empiricism that at best allowed art to equal nature, but not to surpass it.\footnote{Rensselaer Lee discusses how the literary concept of imitation is applied to the arts in the Renaissance, specifically noting two types: the literal and ideal. See Rensselaer W. Lee, "Imitation," in \textit{Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting} (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967), 9-16.} Literary scholar G. W. Pigman, III, identifies three categories of imitation that exist in the Renaissance: following, imitation and emulation. “Following” may be understood as a deficiency of mind and means, “imitation” as a process of replication with the intent to equal the model, and “emulation” as an attempt to rival and supersede one’s source. Pigman’s divisions can to some extent be associated with Danti’s definitions. Following and imitation (or equaling) can be linked to discussions of \textit{ritrarre}. Both notions appear in Renaissance texts on art, specifically within the context
of learning one's craft. They are understood as foundational steps in the creative process, a process that will ultimately allow an artist to surpass its model through emulation.\textsuperscript{9} However, one cannot creatively imitate or perform \textit{imitare} without first mastering the ability to copy.

When discussing artistic education, theorists stress the importance of developing the ability to make an empirical observation. In his instructional treatise, \textit{Il Libro dell'Arte} (c. 1390), Cennino Cennini (1370-1440) proclaims that the best guidance for an artist is obtained through copying nature. He states, nature "outdoes all other models; and [one should] always rely on this with a stout heart, especially as you begin to gain some judgment in draftsmanship. Do not fail as you go on, to draw something every day, for no matter how little it is it will be well worth while, and will do you a world of good."\textsuperscript{10} This statement implies that the act of copying directly from nature will always supply the artist with a reliable and accurate model. Yet nature was not an artist's sole source of visual information.\textsuperscript{11} Cennini also recommends looking to the works of another master. "If you follow the course of one man through constant practice, your intelligence would have to be crude indeed for you not to get some nourishment from it."\textsuperscript{12} While the


\textsuperscript{11} The debate over choosing from one or many sources can be traced to discussions of rhetoric and was most notably debated in the Renaissance by Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Pietro Bembo. See Giorgio Santangelo, \textit{Le epistle 'De Imitatione' di Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola e di Pietro Bembo} (Florence: L. S. Olschki, 1954), and Martin L. McLaughlin, "The Dispute Between Giovan Francesco Pico and Bembo," in \textit{Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 249-74.

\textsuperscript{12} Cennini, 15.
act of copying from only one source provides the artists with a stable foundation, it confines the artist to merely following. At most, he will equal his model and never be able to surpass. Therefore, while *rittarre* readies an artist’s hand and allows him to make an accurate reproduction, it binds him to the act of following.

Art theorists of the quattrocento asserted that the artist’s goal was to equal nature through empirical observation. Artist, architect, and writer, Leon Battista Alberti (1406-1472) was a proponent of recording that which presents itself to the eye, as he demonstrated in his instructions on how to create perfect perspective in his treatise *Della Pittura* (1436). When discussing imitation, he declared that the artist who does not equal nature will fail to create beauty and that “the painter who has accustomed himself to taking everything from Nature, will so train his hand that anything he attempts will echo Nature.”13 Yet Alberti also cautioned the artist against being too literal and highlighted the faults of the ancient painter Demetrius who “failed to obtain the highest praise because he was more devoted to representing the likeness of things than to beauty.”14 Alberti instructs the artist to follow the Zeuxian model of imitation by gathering beauty from many sources. He says “excellent parts should all be selected from the most beautiful bodies, and every effort should be made to perceive, understand and express beauty.”15 Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) concurred in his *Trattato della pittura* (published posthumously), as he instructed artists that they “should be like a mirror which

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14 Alberti, 90.

15 Ibid.
is transformed into as many colours as are placed before it, and, doing this, he will seem
to be a second nature.”

Additionally, he urged artists to “make an effort to collect the
good features from many beautiful faces, but let their beauty be confirmed rather by
public renown than your own judgment.” Yet Leonardo also breaks with quattrocento
theorists, claiming that an artist can, in god-like fashion, transform his mind, creating like
nature (natura naturans) in addition to replicating nature (natura naturata). Still, the
former was contingent upon the latter. Quattrocento theorists exhibit the beginnings of
a break with the idea of imitation solely as a copy with their introduction of the Zeuxian
model of creating ideal beauty. However, their understanding of imitation was still
deeply rooted in portraying an accurate reproduction of nature.

Not only is ritrarre fundamental in the sense that the artist must be able to represent
nature accurately before he can perfect it, but also in that he must learn the maniera of
others before he can develop his own style and, thereby, surpass his source(s). In his
novel, Il libro del cortegiano (1528), Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529) presented an
example of how one must begin the process of self-fashioning with ritrarre in order to
devise a unique courtly behavior or style (maniera). First, an individual should follow
one source for “whoever would be a good pupil must not only do things well, but must


17 Leonardo da Vinci, 204. Leonardo’s prescriptions for the creation of beauty reflects a methodology of
creating ideal beauty that can be associated with imitare. However, his interpretation of the goal of art as
equal to nature reflects ritrarre.

18 For a discussion of natura naturata and natura naturans see Jan Bialostocki, "The Renaissance Concept
always make every effort to resemble and, if that be possible, to transform himself into his master.”19 After the individual has mastered – and thus equaled – his model, he can adopt something akin to a Zeuxian process, creatively fashioning his own ideal self image. Castiglione states, “When he feels that he has made some progress, it is very profitable to observe different men of that profession; and, conducting himself with that good judgment which must always be his guide, go about choosing now this thing from one and that from another. And even as in green meadows the bee flits about among the grasses robbing the flowers, so our Courtier must steal this grace from those who seem to him to have it, taking from each the part that seems most worthy of praise....”20 Castiglione’s methodology finds an easy parallel with Danti’s description of the creative process published more than fifty years later. *Imitare* entails recognizing beauty, selecting aspects to emulate, and fashioning a *composto* that forms an ideal.21

Not only was the act of copying essential to developing an artist’s skill, its mastery was required before the artist could creatively copy. Renaissance artist and historian Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), in his *Vite de più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori italiani* (1550 & 1568), highlighted the necessity of *ritrarre* as a practice emphasizing the

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20 Castiglione, 42-43. Castiglione’s bee metaphor is referencing a widely used *topos* to describe the artist’s role in imitation. Its roots are traced to Plato, with additions by Seneca and Macrobius in Roman times. For discussion of the bee metaphor in the Renaissance see James S. Ackerman, "Imitation," in *Origins, Imitation, Conventions: Representation in the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 129, Pigman III, 4-6, and Summers, 189-94.

21 There is debate in the Renaissance over whether the idea of beauty is learned or innate. See Summers, 188-89.
empiricism of likeness and resemblance in his definition of *disegno*, which he defined as "the imitation (imitare) of the most beautiful parts of nature in all figures, whether in sculpture or in painting; and for this it was necessary to have a hand and a brain able to reproduce with absolute accuracy and precision...everything that the eye sees." Vasari contended that perfecting the ability to make an exact replication of nature was an accomplishment of the *seconda maniera* (a group representative of the quattrocento) by stating "so that little is wanting for the reduction of everything to perfection and for the exact imitation of the truth of nature" and "they sought to make that which they saw in nature, and no more, and thus their works came to be better planned and better conceived." Therefore, Vasari, speaking as an artist as well as a theorist, saw *ritrarre* as a necessity for good design and the mastery of replication provided artists of the cinquecento with the ability to move beyond rote repetition into creative copying or *imitare*.

During the sixteenth century, works of art became increasingly important as sources of ideal beauty for artists to emulate. Giorgio Vasari, in particular, instructed artists to gather beauty not only from sources in nature, but also from the works of contemporary masters and ancient sculpture. When observing what the *seconda maniera* lacked, Vasari cited the ideal and pointed to the ever-growing numbers of excavated antiquities as

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23 Vasari, 252.

24 Vasari, 254.
models of excellence. These antiquities, he argued, provided examples of perfection beyond that visible in nature. More significantly, it established a stepped procession that moved art beyond empirical representation. Nature perfected by ancient artists was now subjected to a second perfecting process as contemporary artists attempted to best the best through l'arte dell'imitazione. Best understood as emulation, imitazione reflects a criticism or correction of the source, rather than a direct copy of it. Nonetheless, it relies on the ability to copy, or ritrarre, because the source of imitation must be recognized in order for the improvement to be perceived.

Emulation, as defined by Quintilian, was also understood in the context of its historical relationship. By the mid-cinquecento, art theorists had become focused on art's relationship with its past, as is exemplified by the character of Vasari's Vite. This awareness established an expectation of borrowing from art of the past and created a competitive environment in which the practice of imitare thrived. Raphael (1483-1520) exhibited working methods that exemplify how an artist performed imitare and surpassed nature. Vasari states that by “studying the labours of the old masters and those of the moderns, [Raphael] took the best from them, and, having gathered it together, enriched the art of painting with that complete perfection which was shown in ancient

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25 Vasari, 619.

26 Pigman III, 22-32.

27 In her discussion of rivalry in the Renaissance, Rona Goffen states that the “Renaissance revival of antiquity is concerned not only with archaeological awareness...but also, perhaps subconsciously, with psychological emulation.” See Rona Goffen, Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 4.
times...wherefore nature was left vanquished by his colors.”

Renaissance Venetian writer Ludovico Dolce (1508-1568) underscored Vasari’s claims in his Dialogo della pittura intitolato l’Aretino (1557). “Raphael did not paint at random, or for the sake of practice, but always with much application; and he had two aims. One was to emulate (imitar) the beauty of style found in antique statues, and the other to so vie with nature that, even while he drew his vision of things from the life, he endowed these things with greater beauty of form, seeking out an integral perfection in his works, which is not found in the living world.”

Raphael’s use of imitare allowed him to surpass nature and create works of ideal beauty. It is this process of emulation that led Vasari to associate Raphael with the terza maniera, while relegating his teacher, Pietro Perugino (1450-1523), to the less accomplished era of the seconda maniera. Raphael’s methodology marked a distinct departure from the style of Perugino, who was bound to an uninspired repetition of the model (ritrarre). Perugino’s reliance on the use of ritarre, most notably in the repeated use of his own devised models in his works, characterizes his career c. 1500. Significantly, it is during this transitional period in style where the once prized ability of equaling nature is overshadowed by a desire to surpass the model and create the ideal through emulation or imitazione.

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28 Vasari, 620.

The Practice of *Imitazione*

Changes that occurred in Italian compositional methods around 1500 reflect a shift in the understanding of imitation exhibited through practice. Two related compositional elements that can be linked to imitation are symmetry and the use of cartoons. The practical application of symmetry and the use of cartoons illustrate a move from reproductive copying, or *ritrarre*, into a highly conscious process of emulation, or *imitare*. In the quattrocento, compositional practices displayed an understanding of imitation solely as *ritrarre*, or imitation defined as replication. While the new practices of the cinquecento continued to demonstrate elements of *ritrarre*, artists who failed to embrace the revised paradigm of imitation, as Pietro Perugino did, were criticized for their lack of creative *invenzione*. They would, according to Giorgio Vasari, remain mired in the deficiencies of the second era (*seconda maniera*) of Renaissance art rather than progress to the perfection of the third era. The revision of compositional practices in the cinquecento reflected this move towards perfection through the use of *imitazione* as a means of besting the model, thereby perfecting their art.

A guiding principle in the composition of Renaissance paintings was symmetry. The well established practice of composing a painting in two dimensions, bilateral symmetry, underwent a change during the Renaissance. Bilateral symmetry was characterized by a strong figure on the central vertical axis flanked by reversed forms.

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30 For a discussion of the change in symmetry during the Renaissance see David Summers, "*Figure come fratelli: A Transformation of Symmetry in Italian Renaissance Painting,*" *Art Quarterly* 40 (1977), 59-88.
The artist used cartoons to create bilateral symmetry, because cartoons could be easily flipped to create a pendant. Piero della Francesca’s *Madonna del Parto* (c. 1465) (Fig. 1) exhibits such a case in his portrayal of the Madonna flanked by two mirrored angels. The Virgin’s placement at the central axis stresses her importance and prominence, while the equivalence of form between the two angels signifies their equal, subservient role to the central figure. The use of bilateral symmetry emphasizes the central axis by framing it with the pendant figures and creating an “ABA” pattern. The “A’s” (or angels) offset the emphasis, which is “B” (the Madonna). Bilateral symmetry imbues a composition with explicit meaning by using the equality of the forms to create hieratic symmetry. The reliance of bilateral symmetry on equality to define a painting formally and give meaning to a composition reflects *ritrarre*. In order for meaning to be understood by the viewer, the figures must be recognized as exact copies. The association with *ritrarre* is imperative for bilateral symmetry to succeed on more than a formal level and function as a hierarchical structure that endows a painting with meaning.

The cartoon was also grounded in imitation and provided artists with a mechanical method of making a direct copy. The practice stemmed from a technique used by medieval embroiderers to duplicate difficult patterns in fabric. Artists first consistently used cartoons in the 1440-50s as a method of design reproduction. In the quattrocento, the desire to capture an accurate view of nature through the use of perspective led artists to turn to precise techniques to aid in their quest for achieving an exact replication of nature or *ritrarre*. Therefore, Renaissance artists profited from the

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cartoon’s ability to produce a duplicate image and thus satisfied their need for precision. Cartoons were made of large sheets of paper that corresponded directly to the size of the final work and facilitated the transfer of the composition. By allowing artists to reproduce their design without its corruption through faulty judgment or poor giudizio dell’ occhio, cartoons provided an effective and thorough means of transmitting the carefully calibrated design to the working surface. Cartoon usage in the quattrocento can be linked to ritrarre through the fact that the cartoon was used to make an exact copy. The mechanical techniques of reproduction used with the cartoon allowed artists to reproduce a form within a composition. One such technique, spolvero, involves perforating the cartoon systematically with small holes and then sweeping over the cartoon with a bag of charcoal dust in order to transfer the design efficiently. Spolvero facilitated the production of mirrored figures and therefore aided the creation of bilateral symmetry. The use of the cartoon to duplicate figures is yet another aspect of the conception of imitation as ritrarre.

In addition to serving an economizing role, the cartoon’s ease of transfer allowed the artist to delegate the labor of design transfer to an assistant in his workshop, thus further increasing the efficiency of the design process. However, this ease of replication also allowed cartoon usage to be aligned with negative and exploitative practices. Contemporary theorists cautioned that the use of cartoons encouraged laziness because

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32 Prior to the adoption of widespread cartoon use early quattrocento artists worked directly on the painted surface. Advances in drawing materials and techniques allowed artists to conceive their designs on paper and use cartoons to replicate their design onto the final surface. Cartoons were transferred in one of two methods, spolvero or calco. Spolvero consisted of making tiny perforations in the cartoon and was transferred to the surface by going over with a charcoal dust to form an outline. Calco, a more destructive process, transferred the design by incising it directly into the painted surface. See Bambach, 33-80.
the artist could rely on mechanical techniques to develop their design instead of improving their own giudizio. The reproductive nature of cartoons, in particular the technique of spolvero, allowed for works to be easily plagiarized. This type of reproduction was associated with an inept or corrupt individual who would borrow the designs of others and repeat them in his own works or pass them off as the work of another artist. The repetition of figures in a single artist’s oeuvre was not spared from critical scrutiny and the use of such practices was compared to the work of a craftsman. For example, Giorgio Vasari criticized painters who he called the Madonniere, whose livelihood was characterized by the repeated execution of the same pattern-like image of the Madonna and Child. The association of the copy created by the cartoon with exploitative practices caused a critical-reexamination of the practice of ritrarre, which, in turn, encouraged theorists to condemn artists who aligned their works too closely with this type of imitation.

After 1500, a transition in the understanding of imitation from ritrarre to a form of critically selective emulation, or inizitare, reflects changes in both the construction of pictorial symmetry as well as in the cartoon’s function. The conception of symmetry underwent a transition when the standard of two-dimensional, or bilateral symmetry, became outmoded in favor of a three-dimensional symmetry through the incorporation of the aesthetic element varietà, or compositional variety. In three-dimensional symmetry, forms retain the same ordered clarity as in two-dimensional space, and in early examples

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33 For a discussion of the history of the tradition of copying and its negative associations related to cartoon practices see Bambach, 81-136.

34 Bambach, 100-02.
figures revolve around the same vertical axis that guided bilateral symmetry. For instance, the contours of the archers in Pollaiuolo's *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* (1475) (Fig. 2) exhibit bilateral symmetry guided by the central axis, while their modeled forms show figures that revolve around the central axis in three-dimensional space. The addition of perspectival space complicated the comprehension of divine figures, which was previously delineated by the figure's placement in the upper register of the painting with signified ethereal space. With the placement of figures in "real space," the artist could no longer rely on the same formal methods to provide meaning, and therefore he had to invent a new way of communicating the figures' transcendental quality. Unlike bilateral symmetry, meaning was not assigned through the equivalence of form, but rather through the repetition of a single outline shown in varying perspectives by multiple figures. David Summers has termed these repeated figures the *figure come fratelli*. It is not the equality of the figures that is significant to their understanding, rather it is the critique displayed through their differences (*varietà*) that exhibits emulation and bestows meaning on them.

*Figure come fratelli* satisfied the need for *varietà* by showing a single figure from varying perspectives, yet linked the forms by an identical contour. *Varietà* was a prized aesthetic quality of works of art in the Renaissance, particularly after 1500. Achieving *varietà* allowed the artist to exhibit *facilità* in overcoming *difficultà*, or display an

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35 The motives behind the shift from two- to three-dimensional symmetry can also be linked to the *paragone* between painting and sculpture that becomes a key concern of the cinquecento. Three-dimensional symmetry allows painting to vie with sculpture by attempting to show an equivalent representation.

36 For a discussion of *varietà* see Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*. 
apparently effortless mastery of artistic skill. Varietà, accomplished through figure come fratelli, is a type of emulation because showing multiple views simultaneously was something that could not be done in the natural world. It creates what Summers describes as “an image of impossible equivalence.” This emulation is grounded in the ability to recognize that the multiple contours are copies of one another, yet exploits their differences in order to give meaning to the composition. Therefore, the individual instances of comparison between figures can be viewed in the context imitare as well. Each pair (or in some cases multiple pairs) of corresponding forms criticizes the other; there is no model or copy, but rather a highly constructed game of emulation between the pairs. For example, in Raphael’s St. Michael (1518) (Fig. 3) he constructs the figure come fratelli as the figure of the saint and the devil. The same figure is shown twice, both from the front and the reverse. The figures are linked only by the similarity of their single contour, and each interaction represents an instance of imitazione as each figure shows what the other cannot.

Emulation also characterized the use of cartoons by artists of the cinquecento. After 1500, two traditions of cartoon usage existed: the coarse outline cartoon that served a working function and a highly finished cartoon that reflected the artist’s refined design. The cartoon was not only used for replication, it assumed an exploratory role. The cartoon’s elevated status is reflected in the practice of the ben finito cartone, or well-

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37 For quote see Summers, "Figure come fratelli: A Transformation of Symmetry in Italian Renaissance Painting," 76. Through the figure come fratelli, painting was also emulating sculpture, thus satisfying the paragone. In this instance, painting surpasses sculpture by transcending temporal constraints and showing the viewer two instances in time in a single viewing.
finished cartoon, which was first used in the late quattrocento by Leonardo. The *ben finito cartone* reflected a move from the cartoon as a reproductive technique into the process of *disegno* through its highly finished nature. Art historian Carmen Bambach attributes this change in function to the quattrocento interest in the scientific study of perspective, which in turn, encouraged an interest in refinement of design. *Disegno*, as both figural and compositional design as well as *disegnare*, which is the act of drawing, are characterized by a series of progressive studies that distills the artist’s idea. The *ben finito cartone* marked a final step in the elucidation of the design by ensuring compositional unity, as well as a careful calibration of the design with the working surface. The shift in the cartoon’s function to a compositional device allowed the cartoon to be associated with *imitare* through its clear link to *disegno*.

While the reproductive quality of the cartoon ties it to *ritrarre*, the use of the cartoon to refine *disegno* aligns it with a self-critical emulation that reflects a trend towards *imitare*. Artists who used cartoons to refine their composition and strengthen

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38 The highly finished cartoon was termed *ben finito cartone* by Giovanni Battista Armenini (1529-1609) in *De' veri precetti della pittura* (1586). See Giovanni Battista Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, trans. Edward Olszewski (New York: B. Franklin, 1977). This concept arises out of the elevation of the cartoon from a working tool to a highly finished example of an artist’s design and talent. Michelangelo’s *Battle of Cascina* and Leonardo’s *Battle of Anghiari* are two notable examples of *ben finito cartone* which were put on public display and held as models for study.

39 The *ben finito cartone* was not necessarily used in working practices and practical cartoons (like those used earlier in the quattrocento) were still employed. One hypothesized method, which allowed for the cartoon to be preserved, while still employing it as a mechanical instrument of design transfer was by the use of a substitute cartoon. A substitute cartoon consisted of a second sheet of paper that was placed under the original cartoon as it was pricked. The substitute would be used in the destructive process of transfer therefore preserving the original finished cartoon. See Bambach, 283-95.

40 *Disegno* encapsulated both the idea of design and drawing and was the fundamental element of Renaissance art according to Giorgio Vasari. For an overview of how the concept of *disegno* manifested itself in Renaissance drawing and compositional methods see "Drawing and Design in Italian Renaissance Painting," in *Art in the Making: Underdrawings in Renaissance Paintings*, ed. David Bomford (London: National Gallery Company, 2002), 53-79.
their design exploited the cartoon's mimetic ability to assess and correct their own idea. However, just as the ability of *imitare* is rooted in *ritrarre*, so is this self-critique possible only because the cartoon produced an accurate copy. It is the use of this reproductive ability within the context of self-criticism that allows the artist to engage in *imitazione*.

The shift in the usage of the cartoon and its use in the [re]production of figures also reflects the change in the conception of imitation. Two-dimensional symmetry uses equality to give meaning and therefore reflects *ritrarre*. Three-dimensional symmetry copes with the new demands of perspective and uses *varietà* to critique the equality of forms in order to imbue the paintings with meaning through *figure come fratelli*. In the quattrocento, cartoons were used to make an exact copy and in turn assisted the artist in expediting the painting process. In the cinquecento, however, the reproductive nature of the cartoon was shifted into the design process and allowed the artist to be able to perform a self-critical emulation. Finally, the ease of replication made available by the cartoon allowed it to be used for exploitative purposes and was therefore associated with negative practices. These associations, coupled with the cartoon's close link to the outmoded practice of *ritrarre*, allowed theorists to criticize artists, such as Pietro Perugino, who clung to the old methods of composition.
Perugino, Imitazione, and Vasari’s maniere

Pietro Perugino’s compositional methods reflect a quattrocento practice of using the cartoon for replicative purposes and as a means of expediting the design process. He was not singular in this respect. Other artists active in the second era of Vasari’s tripartite history of Renaissance art, such as Perugino’s predecessor Piero della Francesca, relied on the method. Yet as Vasari makes clear in the preface to part three of the Vite, as well as his vita of Perugino, the practice was stopped in the third and “most perfect” final phase of stylistic evolution. In large part this transition underscores the new emphasis placed on creative invention (invenzione), which is a hallmark of la bella maniera. Piero della Francesca, who Vasari believed had a profound ability to equal nature, “did so well that he enabled the moderns to obtain, by following him, that supreme perfection.”41 Perugino, however, was hindered by his exploitation of quattrocento methods and did not provide artists of the terza maniera with a good example of how to imitate. Thus, despite Perugino’s activity during the sixteenth century, his alliance with quattrocento methods prompted Vasari to consign him to the seconda maniera.

In his Vite, Vasari presented Perugino as a successful and well-respected artist. Not only were his works in great demand, but young artists flocked from all over Europe to learn from the great master. However, the Aretine critic also characterized Perugino as an artist driven by his meager beginnings to achieve great fame and wealth, which in turn

41 Vasari, 400.
became the force behind his artistic success. These same motivational forces encouraged Perugino to adopt working practices to economize his design, which allowed for increased productivity and therefore increased income. Vasari believed that Perugino’s *modus operandi* invested his works with a formulaic quality that was ultimately visually boring. “He always had so many works in hand, that he would very often use the same subjects; and he had reduced the theory of his art to a manner so fixed, that he made all of his figures with the same expression.” This characterization of Perugino’s style as lacking creativity underscores Vasari’s assessment of the deficiencies of the *seconda maniera*, which included a lack of creative license or *licenza*.

Much like other quattrocento artists, Perugino relied on the cartoon’s ability to produce an accurate and legible silhouette in order to reproduce his linear drawing style. While there are no extensive scientific analyses of Perugino’s work to uncover remains of cartoon use, there is evidence of his reliance on them. In 2004, a study using infrared reflectography found instances of *spolvero* in the *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1512-23) at the Galleria Nazionale dell’Umbria, which indicates that Perugino used cartoons.

Additionally, Carmen Bambach examined Perugino’s sole surviving cartoon, the *Head of*

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42 Vasari, 593.

43 Vasari, 618.


St. Joseph of Arimathea (Christ Church, Oxford) alongside its corresponding painting, Lamentation at the Uffizi (1495) and found that the cartoon was carefully marked to allow for alignment with the working surface. By the mid-quattrocento, the use of cartoons was widespread. There can be no doubt that the young Perugino had been introduced to this practice during his formative years. Verrocchio’s convention of providing exemplum or pattern cartoons to assist in the education of his workshop must have made a profound impact on his students, including Perugino.

A noted practice arose in the quattrocento of entrusting assistants with the task of transferring the design, hence providing a means of expediting the artistic process. The cartoon’s reproductive ability allowed the artist to confidently have his assistants transfer the design without fear of compromising the original intent. Like his contemporaries, Perugino used cartoons in such a manner, particularly to help manage his large number of commissions. At the height of his success, Perugino managed not one but two workshops. One was located in Perugia, the other in Florence. Moreover, he was often absent from both due to his commissions throughout the Italian peninsula. These demands on Perugino forced him to assume a managerial role. He obtained commissions and oversaw production, whereas the actual realization of a painting depended on the skill of others. Within this operating system, cartoons served both as a means for Perugino to communicate designs to his workshop(s), as well as a way of efficiently

46 Bambach, 87-89.

47 Carmen Bambach cites examples of drawings of Perugino’s contemporaries in Verrocchio’s studio (Leonardo and Lorenzo di Credi), which were clearly used as patterns for the studio to copy. See Bambach, 83-86.
dividing the labor of production. Given the great demand for a work by Perugino’s hand, Rudolf Hiller von Gaetringen has hypothesized that the painter created a “conveyer belt” of production. This type of workshop allowed for his assistants to take over the laborious process of execution, while saving Perugino’s hand for the most prestigious and best-paid commissions.\textsuperscript{48} Perugino’s exploitation of the cartoon in his workshop to streamline the design process relied on its execution of an exact copy, which allowed him to delegate labor without altering his autograph design.

Perugino’s use of bilateral symmetry further reflects his quattrocento methodology, but also aligns his conception of imitation not as a critique of the original, but merely as a copy. His handling of the planar surface and vertical axis strongly exhibits frontality and centrality, two necessary characteristics for bilateral symmetry.\textsuperscript{49} Perugino satisfied the requirement of frontality through his treatment of the painted surface as a two-dimensional plane. His execution of perspective is characteristic of quattrocento methods, as he uses a central vanishing point with a systematic placement that corresponds to an underlying grid. Figures in the foreground appear larger and the space is further delineated by the requisite landscape in the distance. In \textit{Marriage of the Virgin} (1502-04) (Fig. 4), Perugino flattens the perspective by pushing the main scene to the front of the picture plane, and his lack of variety in poses and figure placement demonstrates Perugino’s limited attempt at spatial representation.

\textsuperscript{48} Hiller von Gaertringen, "L’uso del cartone nell’ opera di Perugino," 156.

\textsuperscript{49} Summers, "Figure come fratelli: A Transformation of Symmetry in Italian Renaissance Painting."
Centrality, a second prerequisite for bilateral symmetry, was reflected by Perugino’s strong use of the vertical axis, as he primarily arranged his works in the vertical format. Given the time in which Perugino worked (particularly the height of his career c. 1500), the use of such compositional methods was outdated and reflected earlier quattrocento practices. Perugino’s *Marriage of the Virgin* pales in comparison to his student Raphael’s painting of the same subject from 1504 (Fig. 5). Raphael’s version is organized around the central axis, yet portrays figures through their varied placement and diverse poses more volumetrically within space. This variation not only gives a more convincing spatial representation, it also achieves the favorable condition of *varietà*. Perugino, however, exhibited a limited understanding of three dimensions that reflected the Albertian prescribed methodology of perspective of the mid-quattrocento. His arrangement of figures in the foreground constrains the ability of the painting to be perceived in three dimensions, particularly the two reversed flanking figures that frame the composition, their backs toward the viewer. This device emphasizes the planarity of the surface by creating a visual boundary thereby limiting perception of three-dimensional space. Raphael’s framing figures, in contrast, extend towards the viewer and direct attention into the virtual space. This allows them to function as *repoussoir* figures that frame the scene and direct the eye. The rightmost figure not only bends forward toward the viewer, but is rotated at a 45 degree angle to the picture plane, therefore defying the constraints of the surface. Further, Perugino’s attempt at a comparable figure (the suitor bending at the left in his painting) results in an awkward and contorted pose due to Perugino’s adherence to the two-dimensional surface to guide his design.
Contrary to Perugino’s rote repetition, Raphael’s emulation of his teacher’s *Marriage of the Virgin* demonstrated an improvement on the model through his more refined arrangement, while still retaining Perugino’s basic composition. While Raphael’s version can be identified with the original, his correction of Perugino’s less adept spatial representation identifies this instance of imitation as emulation rather than merely as a copy. Perugino’s clear reliance on two dimensions and the central axis to compose his works forced him to use bilateral symmetry, rather than advance to the more refined practice of three-dimensional symmetry used by artists in the cinquecento.

Bilateral symmetry was executed through the repetition of a single cartoon and relied on the recognition of the opposing figures as equals in order to imbue a painting with meaning. The clearest example of Perugino’s use of bilateral symmetry can be seen in the frequently repeated motif of angels flanking a central figure. One such case is the *Ascension of Christ* in the *Polittico di San Pietro* in Lyon (1496-1500) (Fig. 6), where Perugino created bilateral symmetry by framing the figure of Christ with angels in an ABA pattern. He constructs a hierarchical arrangement where the angels highlight the main focus of the composition, Christ.\(^5\) In the lunette above, a similar pattern appears with two identical angels framing the figure of God. This method of composing a painting can be linked to earlier quattrocento practices, such as those seen in Piero della Francesca’s *Madonna del Parto* (c. 1465). (Fig. 1) Perugino’s usage of bilateral symmetry both ties his practices to those of the quattrocento and links his conception of imitation to *ritrarre*. Raphael, in contrast, used cartoons to create the *figura come fratelli*,

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\(^5\) The identification of the ABA pattern is complicated by the addition of the musician figures, which cannot be conclusively identified as cartoon reversal.
as seen in his *St. Michael* (1518) (Fig. 3). In this instance, Raphael portrayed the same figure from two opposing viewpoints in three-dimensional space. The figures of St. Michael and the devil (made from the identical contour) critique one another by showing what the other cannot, therefore the pair represents an instance of emulation rather than imitation. Raphael’s use of the cartoon to create three-dimensional symmetry is a cinquecento practice reliant on the perception of imitation as *imitare*. Perugino, instead, relied on the outdated quattrocento method of bilateral symmetry to define a composition hieratically. Further, the acceptable reuse of cartoons in bilateral symmetry laid the foundation for Perugino’s most notable characteristic, the reuse of figures and compositions within his *oeuvre*.

Perugino’s body of work displays a career made possible through reuse and resulted from his habit of repeating figures and compositions. The resounding similarities found between works necessitated an accurate method of replicating these patterns, and various hypotheses have been put forward on how Perugino could have done so, including the repetition of drawings, a pattern book, as well as reusing cartoons.51 Given the high demand on his workshop, as well as the conservative environment of religious patronage, the recycling of old cartoons offers the most

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compelling proposed working method.\textsuperscript{52} Regardless of the motivation and execution, it is evident that Perugino tirelessly repeated elements and compositions.

Motivated to streamline his production, Perugino made a significant alteration to cartoon usage through the incorporation of the cartoon into his design formulation, rather than solely using it for transference or replication. Perugino was able to further economize his design by taking advantage of the cartoon’s ability to reproduce prior compositions and figures. Hiller von Gaetringen begins to shed light on Perugino’s methodology by retracing motifs found in his surviving works.\textsuperscript{53} The repetition and reconfiguration of forms creates a non-cohesive artistic style in which Perugino’s works resemble a collage rather than a highly refined design. For instance, the reuse of figures from a variety of sources recombined to form a new composition can be seen in his \textit{Vallombrosa Altarpiece} (1500) (Fig. 7), in which the figure of God and the framing angels and musicians are repeated from the \textit{Polittico di San Pietro}, while the lower saints stem from a variety of other sources. A similar “cut and paste” technique is seen in the work by Perugino’s student, Lo Spagno, in the \textit{Agony in the Garden}, where the figures, who had been separated from their original cartoon, now appear to have been stamped

\textsuperscript{52} Art historian Michael Baxandall attributes this practice of repeating types to the painting’s devotional function, which would necessitate a typology that could be easily identifiable and therefore, allow the viewer to project their own meaning or devotion onto the painting. See Michael Baxandall, \textit{Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style}, 2nd ed. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 45-46.

onto the landscape in a new compositional arrangement. Because of the stylistic
similarities between Perugino and Lo Spagno’s works, Bambach concluded that Perugino
designed his compositions in a manner where individual figures were reused and
carefully calibrated to their new context.\textsuperscript{54} Perugino’s design of the \textit{Vallombrosa}
\textit{Altarpiece} is exemplary of his common practice of reappropriating figures to create new
compositions. The figure of St. Michael (Fig. 8) which is a derivation of Lucino Sicino
from the \textit{Collegio del Cambio} (1496-1500) (Fig. 9) can serve as an example. It was
reused again in the \textit{Certosa Altarpiece} (Fig. 10). In this case, the figure is repeated in a
variety of contexts (with different identities) with little or no alteration to the overall
design.\textsuperscript{55} This method of compositional design reflected a dependence on the rote
repetition of forms, rather than an ability to invent anew and create original designs.

While Perugino’s method of figure reuse marked the incorporation of the cartoon
into the design process, he failed to embrace the cinquecento practice of using cartoons
for design refinement. Instead, Perugino worked out his compositions in his mind and
executed them through the repetition of prior forms. As examined above, Perugino
configured (and reconfigured) prior designs rather than designing entirely new
compositions. Raphael, however, used the cartoon to refine his idea, making a distinct
departure from his teacher’s practice as his design progressed to a \textit{ben finito cartone}.
Additionally, since Raphael worked out his ideas through constant drawing and

\textsuperscript{54} Bambach, 86-91.

\textsuperscript{55} Hiller von Gaetringen noted an eloquent change to that figure that modified its contrapposto and suggests
that Raphael, rather than Perugino, may have made the alteration. Hiller von Gaetringen, \textit{"L’uso del
cartone nell’opera di Perugino,"} 163.
refinement rather than the reuse of established motifs, he had a repertoire of discarded
designs to draw upon and refine to a finished product. This practice marks a transition
into the cinquecento manner of using cartoons to perform *imitare* rather than solely
*ritrarre*. In this instance, Raphael is critiquing himself and using cartoons to improve his
disegno. This improvement contrasts with Perugino’s rote repetition of figures, which
prohibits him from carrying out this critique of his designs or performing self-emulation.

Perugino’s reliance on replication exhibited a conscious self-plagiarism devoid of
artistic invention, which in turn allowed critics, most notably Vasari, to draw associations
with craftsmen (*artigani*) rather than with creative artists (*artiste*). Vasari addresses
Perugino’s practice of reuse in his discussion of the *SS. Annunziata Assumption (1505-
07)* (Fig. 12), where he relayed that Perugino was criticized by his peers for re-
appropriating figures “either through avarice or to save time.”

This criticism is
substantiated by the obvious repetitions of both the composition and many of the figures
from the *Polittico di San Pietro*. The most significant alteration to the model was the
transformation of the figure of Christ into the Virgin, which in turn necessitated the
change of the lower central figure from the Virgin to a male apostle. This slight change
highlights Perugino’s practice of making figural adaptations to allow him to repeat prior
designs rather than invent anew. Perugino’s practice of compositional reuse does not
represent a criticism of the model, but rather an exploitation of repetition in order to
increase the efficiency of design. This exploitation clearly did not incorporate the new

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56 Vasari, 594.
concept of *imitare* and allowed Vasari to not only criticize him, but also relegate him to the *seconda maniera*.

Vasari intentionally portrays Perugino as a transitional artist, one who mastered the accomplishment of the *seconda maniera*, but failed to advance to the demands of the *terza maniera*. Andrew Ladis stated that Vasari’s intent with his portrayal and placement of Perugino’s *vita* was, both literally and figuratively, to situate Perugino at the height of the *seconda maniera*. The denunciation of Perugino by his successors for compositional reuse highlighted the notion of transition and symbolized Perugino’s redundancy due to his conception of imitation. It is clear from Vasari’s commentary that Perugino’s reuse was seen unfavorably and his reliance on this shortcut prevented him from performing *imitare*. Further, Vasari’s characterization of Perugino’s student, Raphael, encapsulates the notion of transition from *ritrarre* into *imitare*. His description of Raphael portrays him as breaking from Perugino’s style in favor of taking the best from many sources or performing *imitare*, rather than simply following the style of his master. Further, Vasari’s assertion that Raphael’s success came only after he “purged himself of Pietro’s manner,” suggests it is Perugino’s view towards imitation that he shed. His conception and execution of imitation is a marked deviation from Perugino’s method and is indicative of the overall change that occurred with the transition into the *maniera moderna*.

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58 Vasari, 741.
In his preface to the third part of his *Vite*, Vasari defined the style of the *terza maniera* through a series of paradoxes observed in each of the five requisite principles of the *bella maniera* that emphasized what the quattrocento lacked, rather than what the cinquecento achieved. The artists of the *terza maniera* only reached perfection by emending those qualities of the quattrocento. For instance, rule was improved through the addition of creative license (*licenza*), rather than striving in vain (*stento*) to adhere strictly to the rule. The addition of variety (*varietà*) to their style allowed the artists of the cinquecento to cast off the dry *maniera* of the quattrocento and achieve the grace (*grazia*) of the *bella maniera*. The differences observed between Perugino and his student, Raphael, in their execution of imitation is yet another dichotomy in this series that elucidates the stylistic differences between the quattrocento and cinquecento. The deconstruction of imitation into two very different modes; *ritrarre* and *imitare*, defines this change in style and explains Perugino's situation within Vasari's artistic paradigm. Perugino's use of the cartoon to create an exact replication and perform self-plagiarism, rather than critique his prior designs, reflects his understanding of imitation solely as *ritrarre*. Vasari's placement of Perugino within his *Vite* criticized his outmoded conception of imitation and, in turn, aligned Perugino with the artists of the *seconda maniera*.

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50 Sohm, 105-108.
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Figure 3. Raphael, *St. Michael*, 1518, Musée du Louvre, Paris.
Figure 4. Pietro Perugino, *Marriage of the Virgin*, 1502-04, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Caen.
Figure 5. Raphael, *Marriage of the Virgin*, 1504, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.
Figure 6. Pietro Perugino, *Ascension of Christ*, 1495-1500, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon.
Figure 7. Pietro Perugino, *Assumption of the Virgin (Vallombrosa Altarpiece)*, 1500, Galleria dell’Accademia, Florence.
Figure 8. Pietro Perugino, *Detail of St. Michael (Vallombrosa Altarpiece)*, 1500, Galleria dell’Accademia, Florence.
Figure 9. Pietro Perugino, *Detail of Lucino Sicino, Leonida*, 1496-1500, Collegio del Cambio, Perugia.
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