

**Beyond Painting:  
Carlo Crivelli's Celestial Fictions**

**Volume One**

**Text**

Amanda Hilliam

The National Gallery, London  
Oxford Brookes University  
School of History, Philosophy and Culture  
Department of History of Art

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## **Abstract**

In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the work of Carlo Crivelli (c.1430/5-94/5) among historians of early modern art. With his combination of traditional techniques, such as the gold ground, and witty effects of pictorial illusion, Crivelli's work makes an effective case study for revisionist methods in art history, demonstrating the fluid boundary between 'medieval' and 'renaissance' art. However, the findings have been fragmentary, mostly conveyed in articles, essays and multi-author exhibition catalogues. Moreover, the relationship between Crivelli's technical practice and the functions of his paintings in their original setting has not been the subject of sustained analysis.

This thesis applies a new methodology to the study of Crivelli's work. It examines his paintings as material objects, drawing upon recent technical analysis carried out at the National Gallery, London, in light of the devotional practices of his original viewers, and contemporary theological and art-theoretical debates. By applying a holistic approach, this thesis enables a nuanced understanding of how Crivelli's distinctive pictorial language operated in the Marche region on Italy's east coast, where he worked during the second half of the fifteenth century. The first part is a case study of Crivelli's altarpieces for the town of Ascoli Piceno, which serves to underpin his practice in geographic terms. It investigates the dialogues Crivelli's paintings pose with local examples of goldsmiths' and textile art, festive customs, and the spectatorship of his Dominican patrons. A technical study of Crivelli's polyptychs for the Order of Preachers explores the rigour of his methods and their visual results. This introduces the themes of the latter chapters, which investigate material and pictorial interplay. It is argued that the use of three-dimensional relief, and Crivelli's tempera technique, inform how his pictures function as interfaces between the viewer and the sacred. Crivelli's paintings are interpreted in relation to medieval theories of artistic creation, demonstrating that the interaction between ornament, figure and ground aids his pictures to perform their devotional function.

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[The Acknowledgements section has been removed at the request of the author].

## *Introduction*

### **Locating Carlo Crivelli**

Today, viewers of Carlo Crivelli's (c.1430-94/5) work are likely to respond in the following ways. Visitors to the National Gallery in London, which houses the largest collection of the fifteenth-century painter's work, notice that his altarpieces look different from anything else they have seen on the walls of the Sainsbury Wing. Absorbed by the play on different types of illusion, they marvel at Crivelli's incredible technical skill: his immaculately painted forms, obsessive attention to detail, richly gilded surfaces and objects rendered in real gesso relief. They wonder why there are life-size flies, cucumbers and snails in the foregrounds of his pictures, which seem so incongruous in religious paintings, and are struck by the modernity of these witty devices. They delight in noticing gems and real sculpted objects attached to the picture surface, and are drawn in by these eye-catching details. They wonder why the figures' anatomy and poses are so exaggerated, with long fingers gesturing in strange ways, mouths open and eyes vacant. They notice that Crivelli signs his work prominently, and they wonder why they have not heard of him. I hear visitors to the Gallery ask these questions; friends who know nothing about renaissance painting ask me about them; and I myself asked them when I saw Crivelli's work for the first time.

Art historians who know Crivelli, on the other hand, are effusive: "I love Crivelli," they say. "Have you figured out what the cucumber means?" As one art historian told me when I began my PhD, he is everyone's favourite artist at the moment. None of us were taught anything about him at university, and there is an eagerness to find out more about this arcane painter whose work attracts (and often repels) us all on a very visceral level.

There is every reason to believe that 550 years ago, Crivelli's work prompted a similarly visceral response in the viewer. His very representational system, built around tensions between haptic and optic, was calculated to do precisely this. He employed disparate scales within the same work; he combined painted illusion with sculptural illusion; he juxtaposed reflective gold with impeccably painted surfaces, and he depicted shadows both 'on' and 'in' his altarpieces and small panels for private devotion. Take, for example, the *Virgin and Child* in the Victoria and Albert Museum, which dates to the early 1480s (**fig. 1**). The sacred pair are located in a liminal space, behind the stone parapet upon which a carnation and a fly cast shadows, and where Crivelli's signature is carved, but in front of the cloth-of-honour and the fruit festoon. However, the latter appears to hang from either side

of the picture's actual frame, making us unsure how to situate the Virgin and Child. The stone parapet reads as flush with the panel's surface, and therefore objects placed upon it seem to belong to the viewer's space. The naked Christ Child, enveloped in his Mother's mantle and held in place with her elegant hands, sits upon this entryway to the painted fiction. He is framed by the gold mantle heightened in gesso relief, which reflects real light, drawing our attention to the panel's surface. And yet, this mantle is shaded to produce the illusion that it covers the Virgin's body, which is internal to the painted scene. The Christ Child turns and looks out; he appears to notice us. The Virgin looks obliquely towards the fly, eyeing up the insect that has landed on top of the painting.

Crivelli has interwoven a series of spatial ambiguities that connect different realities. Caught between them are the Virgin and Child, who are aware of the viewer's space, but located within the painted fiction. The painting is, indeed, nothing other than a fiction, a fact we are made acutely aware of through those spatial ambiguities orchestrated by the artist who declared his authorship so emphatically on the stone parapet. It is an object with a surface, but the immaculate egg-tempera finish and finely-wrought gold open up the possibility of a celestial sphere beyond.

This thesis explores the productive possibilities of material and visual interplay in Crivelli's altarpieces and small panels for private devotion. Taking the tension between artifice and reality of works like the V&A *Madonna* as a starting point, it will examine the physical characteristics of Crivelli's art in relation to theological and philosophical ideas that were circulating in Europe at this time. Crivelli's representational system thus informs the hybrid methodology of this study. By bridging the material examination of the pictures with an investigation of wider theoretical issues, I will apply a new approach to the work of Crivelli that sheds light on his creative practice in its original context. Previous studies treat the material characteristics, iconography, devotional functions and social context of Crivelli's paintings separately. While on the one hand, there is a wealth of technical studies on most of his paintings carried out by conservators and technical art historians based in museums, on the other, recent art-historical scholarship focuses on the social context of Crivelli's work and the functions of his distinctive idiom therein. My contention is that we may only come closer to understanding Crivelli's art by examining it holistically, taking into consideration both material and meaning. How Crivelli's paintings operate physically as objects, and the bodily effect they have on the viewer, cannot be separated from their subject or significance.

The ways in which recent scholars have approached the cucumber, whose strangeness fascinates viewers today, demonstrates my point. Thomas Golsenne's theory

that this gourd, which is seen so often in Crivelli's paintings, either sitting on the pictorial threshold or dangling near the Virgin's head (**figs. 2, 3**), is a signature and a figure for Crivelli as an artist is, I think, in itself compelling.<sup>1</sup> The cucumber's size, its prominent location, the specificity with which it is painted, and, above all, its novelty all suggest this. However, Golsenne's view that "Crivelli's artistic approach is independent of the ideas of his time" means that he is unable to accommodate the multiple meanings that elements such as the cucumber engender.<sup>2</sup> The French scholar repeatedly disavows iconography as a way of studying Crivelli's work, and disclaims the role that his patrons may have played in determining the appearance of his pictures. He mocks scholars who have used this approach, writing, for example, that "Lightbown assumes that Crivelli jotted on a notebook passages from sermons or patristic writings that would give symbolic meaning to these plant ornaments."<sup>3</sup>

The way Golsenne puts it is comic, and Ronald Lightbown, who wrote a vast monograph on Crivelli that systematically dissects the iconography of each painting, did overemphasise symbolism.<sup>4</sup> But Crivelli's paintings in fact suggest that he engaged in conversation with his patrons about theology and ornament. By insisting on Crivelli the individual, Golsenne fails to appreciate the painter's sensitivity towards the interests of his audiences, who offered him precious hints about how to give his paintings presence. For instance, the cloth-of-honour can function as a reliquary, as Golsenne argues, but it can also have symbolic import, and a material significance that relates to the actual ritual practice of Crivelli's patrons in the historical context of the Marche, as I will show in Chapter One. Similarly, while the cucumber may represent Crivelli's own ingenuity, it can, I argue, simultaneously be a symbol of rebirth, as Lightbown believed,<sup>5</sup> and a reference to religious festivals where vegetable festoons honoured the sacred, as Liliana Leopardi has proposed,<sup>6</sup> whilst also leading the viewer into the image, functioning as a vivid device for bridging real

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<sup>1</sup> Golsenne, "Portrait of the Artist as a Cucumber," in *Ornament and Illusion: Carlo Crivelli of Venice*, ed. Stephen J. Campbell (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2015), exhibition catalogue, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 79-93; Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli et le matérialisme mystique du Quattrocento* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2017), 155-64.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 181. All translations are the author's unless otherwise specified.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 149.

<sup>6</sup> Leopardi, "Aesthetic Hybrids: Interpreting Carlo Crivelli's Ornamental Style" (PhD Thesis., New York University, Institute of Fine Arts, 2007), 208-9; Leopardi, "Review of the exhibition *Ornament and Illusion: Carlo Crivelli of Venice*," *Renaissance Studies* 31, no. 4 (2016): 644.

and pictorial space, a theory that Anna Degler has developed.<sup>7</sup> As Leopardi counsels, we may never find a single answer to what the cucumber signifies.<sup>8</sup>

Nonetheless, the fact remains that it is a plant of elongated shape containing seeds, which could be read as physically penetrating the sacred image, or dangling jarringly near the Virgin's head. Considering this, and that medieval texts describe the devotee entering Christ's side wound as if through a vagina into the womb, an analogy that finds its way into many images of the period,<sup>9</sup> it is entirely possible that the fifteenth-century viewer may have been reminded of male genitalia and procreation, as well as a host of Christian concerns: rebirth, but overwhelmingly, original sin and human redemption. In fact, the viewer may have recognised their own sin by making the sexual association in the first place, a threat that was held in balance by their devotion towards the holy beings depicted.<sup>10</sup> Crivelli's first audiences did not need to have read Freud in order to make this connection. The fact that the cucumber has the capacity to remind the Christian viewer of what is at stake in their religious practice makes it an effective analogy for Crivelli's own artistic power.

In sum, there is not one sole explanation for such complex components of Crivelli's art as the cucumber. Crivelli's work has no hierarchy of meaning: his thinking is rhizomatic, in a Deleuzian sense.<sup>11</sup> Materiality links to symbol, symbol to artistry, and artistry to ritual, and in any order. I argue that Crivelli intended his paintings to be multivalent, and that they worked in this way during devotion. The beholder could move, by way of association, between one object, form, figure or symbol to another, reflecting as they went upon the sacred subject of veneration in new and evocative ways, as I will show in Chapters Two and Six.

My ability to apply multiple methods to the study of Crivelli's work was facilitated by the collaborative nature of this PhD, which I have undertaken at Oxford Brookes University and the National Gallery in London. At the Gallery, I have had privileged access to Crivelli's

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<sup>7</sup> Degler, *Parergon: Attribut, Material und Fragment in der Bildästhetik des Quattrocento* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink, 2015), 81-4.

<sup>8</sup> Leopardi, "Review," 649.

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York: Zone Books, 2011), 197-200.

<sup>10</sup> On vegetable ornament as a reference to procreation, and a symbol of threat, see Ethan Matt Kavaler, "On Vegetable Imagery in Renaissance Gothic," in *Le Gothique de la Renaissance, actes des quatrième, Rencontres d'architecture européenne, Paris, 12-16 juin 2007*, eds. Monique Chatenet et al. (Paris: Picard, 2011), 297-312.

<sup>11</sup> With Félix Guattari, Deleuze developed a notion of non-hierarchical thought patterns based on the botanical rhizome, a root that grows horizontally, sending out multiple roots from its nodes. Their framework for research accommodates multiple-entry points of interest, and is a productive way of examining Crivelli's paintings. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1987], trans. Brian Massumi, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London and New York: Continuum, 2004).

paintings and the expertise of scientific and conservation staff, resulting in a technical examination of one of Crivelli's multipaneled altarpieces. The Gallery's rich Crivelli collection is particularly strong in examples of his work for Ascoli Piceno, a town in the southern Marche on the east coast of Italy.<sup>12</sup> This has motivated my focus on Crivelli's paintings for Ascoli, where I spent four months researching the town's artistic and religious traditions that informed Crivelli's practice. My focus on Ascoli, particularly in the first part, as I outline below, also defines the time frame of this thesis from c. 1470, Crivelli's arrival in the Marche, to c.1494/5, when he died. All of Crivelli's surviving works date to this period, during which he led an itinerant career throughout the Marche region, maintaining Ascoli as his base. Nonetheless, Crivelli's origins in the Veneto were of profound importance to the artist throughout his career. Indeed, although the push and pull between real and unreal that characterises paintings like the V&A *Madonna* is a distinctive mechanism of his art, it is not without roots. As this thesis will show, Crivelli was highly receptive to the environments in which he worked.

## Venice and Padua

Born in Venice and the son of a painter named Jacopo, Crivelli was a contemporary of Giovanni Bellini (c.1435-1516).<sup>13</sup> Unlike Bellini, however, he appears to have observed the work of Giovanni d'Alemagna (active c.1431-50) and Antonio Vivarini (active c.1440-1476/84) with particular attention. The partners ran a successful workshop on the Venetian island of Murano, where they catered to a clientele with a taste for their richly gilded altarpieces often combining sculpted and painted figures (**fig. 4**).<sup>14</sup> Such extravagant, mixed-media works represented an alternative to those of Jacopo Bellini's workshop, which use less gold, are generally more austere, and present holy figures with human weight in realistic settings. In other words, the work of the Bellini family displays what we would call characteristic renaissance features. The Vivarini were fine technical painters who understood perspective, as their *Charity Triptych* with its receding architectural space, demonstrates (1446; **fig. 5**).

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<sup>12</sup> On the history of collecting Crivelli's work at the National Gallery, see Leopardi, "Aesthetic Hybrids," 146-53; Susanna Avery-Quash, "Carlo Crivelli e la National Gallery," in *Crivelli e Brera*, ed., Emanuela Daffra (Milan: Electa, 2009), exhibition catalogue, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, 41-51.

<sup>13</sup> For Crivelli's biography, see Pietro Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli* (Florence: Nardini, 1986), 11-17; Leopardi, "Aesthetic Hybrids," 7-40.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Aikema, "La Cappella d'Oro di San Zaccaria: Arte, religione e politica nella Venezia del Doge Foscari," *Arte Veneta* 57 (2000): 23-41.

But they were masters of the polyptych idiom and all that it stands for: hierarchy, richness in materials and ornament, and with this, limited naturalism.

Crivelli's association with the Vivarini partners is undocumented, but his paintings suggest that he trained with them for a period between 1441, the date of their first altarpiece, and 1457, when Crivelli was imprisoned for living with a married woman.<sup>15</sup> From them, Crivelli learnt how to mould details in gilt gesso, a technique known as *pastiglia*, how to imitate intricately carved stone and wood, and how to simulate gold-thread, brocaded textiles. He learnt that polychrome sculpture was an ideal that painting should imitate, and that ornately carved, gilded architecture was suitable for framing such rich ensembles.

Crivelli also looked to Venice's Byzantine heritage. The scattered light effects produced by the gold mosaics of San Marco's domes offered him a powerful example of the transcendental potential of a tactile visual interface.<sup>16</sup> The *Pala d'Oro*, a late-tenth-century antependium with 255 *cloisonné* enamels and 1,927 pearls and precious stones that depicts the *Life of Christ* and the figures of Saints in separate niches, was the standard against which painted polyptychs were measured.<sup>17</sup> Enamelled figures are suspended against the gold field, projecting forwards from it as separate entities (**fig. 6**). Crivelli must have had such authoritative examples in mind when he inserted gems into the surfaces of his paintings, transforming them into precious objects. He tooled the gold grounds of his altarpieces with elaborate brocade patterns, scattering light and creating a foil from which the sacred figures project. His luminous colours and immaculate, painted surfaces resemble enamels, their lustre competing in brilliance with the reflective gold against which they are seen.<sup>18</sup>

Crivelli's Venetian training, which he advertised by signing "Carolus Crivellus venetus" throughout his career, left an indelible mark. However, after his release from prison in September 1457, he was never documented in Venice again. We next have news of him in

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<sup>15</sup> Liliana Leopardi, "Carlo Crivelli e Tarsia: un nuovo documento," *Arte Veneta* 60 (2003): 195-9; Francesca Coltrinari, "Regesto documentario," in *Vittore Crivelli: da Venezia alle Marche. Maestri del Rinascimento nell'Appennino*, eds. Francesca Coltrini and Alessandro Delpriori (Venice: Marsilio, 2011), exhibition catalogue, Palazzo del Popolo, Sarnano, 191, doc. 6. All citations to archival documents recording Crivelli's activities refer to Coltrinari's *regesto*, which summarises each document in Italian and lists the literature where the original Latin is transcribed.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Hills, *Venetian Colour: Marble, Mosaic, Painting and Glass, 1250-1550* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 23-56.

<sup>17</sup> Hans R. Hahnloser and Renato Polacco, eds., *La Pala d'Oro* (Venice: Canal and Stamperia, 1994); Julian Gardner, "From Gold Altar to Gold Altarpiece: The 'Pala d'Oro' and Paolo Veneziano," in *Encountering the Renaissance*, eds. Molly Bourne and Victor Coonin (Ramsey, New Jersey: The WAPACC Organization, 2016), 259-278.

<sup>18</sup> For a similar comparison between icons and the interplay of painted flesh and the gold background in Trecento painting, see Rona Goffen, "Icon and Vision: Bellini's half-length Madonnas," *The Art Bulletin* 57 (1975): 490.

1463 and 1465 in Zadar, witnessing legal acts on behalf of Italians living in the Dalmatian city then under Venetian rule.<sup>19</sup> Described as a *pictore de Venetiis, civibus et habitatoribus*, Crivelli was citizen of Zadar and an established artist, but no works from his time there appear to have survived.<sup>20</sup> He is next documented in Fermo in the southern Marche in March 1468, signing a polyptych for the church of SS. Lorenzo, Silvano e Rufino in nearby Massa Fermana that same year (**fig. 7**).<sup>21</sup>

The way the Massa Fermana altarpiece is painted, however, informs us that at some point before settling in the Marche, Crivelli must have frequented Francesco Squarcione's Paduan workshop or "*studium*," as it was described by Michele Savonarola, a medical doctor and humanist scholar at the University of Padua.<sup>22</sup> Scholars now agree that this happened after his release from prison, but considering that Crivelli must have been living in Zadar for several years by 1463 if he was already a citizen, he must have only been in Padua briefly. It is very possible that Crivelli may have spent a more significant period of time there in the late 1440s or early 1450s, assisting the Vivarini partners on the painted decorations of the Ovetari chapel (1448-50) in the church of the Eremitani. Hired to work alongside Nicolò Pizolo (c.1430-53) and Andrea Mantegna (c.1431-1506), the Vivarini partners were initially given the lion's share of the work, but Giovanni's death in 1450 meant that only the vault was completed, and that is now destroyed.<sup>23</sup> The style and structure of Squarcione's *Lazzara* polyptych now in Padua's Musei Civici (1449-52) demonstrates his knowledge of the Vivarini partners' *Nativity* polyptych for the Paduan church of S. Francesco Grande (1447; **fig. 8**).<sup>24</sup> Might Crivelli, introduced to Squarcione via the Vivarini partners, have frequented the famous *studium* in the late 1440s or early 1450s after his hypothetical work on the Ovetari chapel fell through? Did he then returned there after his release from prison in 1457, briefly

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<sup>19</sup> Coltrinari, "Regesto," 191, docs. 7, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Crivelli may have painted *Virgin and Child*, now in San Diego, in Zadar (**fig. 155**). As Emil Hilje has argued, a painting now part of the Courtauld collection attributed to Petar Jordanic— a painter from Zadar who is believed to have worked with Crivelli — imitates the San Diego painting closely. See Hilje, "Slika Borgorodice s Djetetom u *The Courtauld Institute of Art* u Londonu – prijedlog za Petra Jordanića," *Ars Adriatica* 4 (2014): 213-34. I want to thank Jadranka Beresford-Pierse for bringing Hilje's article to my attention.

<sup>21</sup> Coltrinari, "Regesto," 192, docs. 37, 38.

<sup>22</sup> Francis Ames-Lewis, *The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artist* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 57-8; On Squarcione generally, see Alberta De Nicolò Salmazo, ed., *Francesco Squarcione 'Pictorum Gymnasiarcha Singularis': Atti delle giornate di studio, Padova, 10-11 febbraio 1998* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 1999).

<sup>23</sup> Ian Holgate, "Giovanni d'Alemagna, Antonio Vivarini and the Early History of the Ovetari Chapel," *Artibus et Historiae* 24, vol. 47 (2003): 9-29.

<sup>24</sup> Alberta De Nicolò Salmazo, *Il soggiorno padovano di Andrea Mantegna* (Padua: Programma, 1993), 11; Roberto Longhi, "Lettera pittorica a Giuseppe Fiocco," in *Saggi e Ricerche 1925-1928*, vol. 1 (Florence: Sansoni, 1967), 83.

but for enough time to study Mantegna's *San Zeno* altarpiece, from which he drew inspiration for the predella panels of the Massa Fermana altarpiece?<sup>25</sup> We may only speculate, as Crivelli's presence in Padua is undocumented. What is certain, however, is that the activities of Squarcione's art academy, of which Mantegna, Marco Zoppo (c.1432-c.1478) and Giorgio Schiavone (1436/7-1504) were graduates, had a deep impact on Crivelli.<sup>26</sup>

If the Vivarini partners gave Crivelli material splendour, we might say Squarcionism gave him pictorial illusion and a lapidary finish. I say Squarcionism, because Squarcione himself was a mediocre painter; it was his rigorous training regime and intellectual ideals that were influential. Squarcione may also have encouraged an interest among his students in the recent and ancient past. Giotto's frescos in the Arena Chapel (1303-5), with their fictive reliefs and figures 'stepping' out of their niches, may have initiated both Crivelli's life-long fascination with pictorial thresholds and Mantegna's early meta-pictorial experiments in works such as *St Mark the Evangelist* with its *cartellino* 'falling away' from the picture surface (c.1450; **fig. 9**).<sup>27</sup> Squarcione's apprentices were also aware of the stories told by Pliny the Elder in the *Natural History*, later retold by Antonio di Piero Averlino (c.1400-c.1469), called Filarete, and Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72), about ancient paintings so life-like, that people and animals believed them to be real.<sup>28</sup> The flies that have 'landed' on the surface of Crivelli's paintings, and the garlands 'draped' across them, have their origins in those tales.<sup>29</sup> For Filarete, painting as an imitative medium surpassed sculpture, which "will always appear to be the material it is."<sup>30</sup> Whether Crivelli was an apprentice, or simply an occasional visitor to the *studium*, is not known, but his earliest work, particularly the *Virgin and Child* now in Verona (c.1450-60; **fig. 10**), which situates the figures behind a stone parapet surrounded by

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<sup>25</sup> The *San Zeno Altarpiece* was made by Mantegna in Padua and sent to Verona in 1460. Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 103-8; Debora Tosato, "La prima attività di Crivelli tra Venezia, Padova e le Marche," in Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 64.

<sup>26</sup> Stefano G. Casu, "Giorgio Schiavone e Carlo Crivelli nella bottega dello Squarcione," *Proporzioni* 1 (2000): 37-54.

<sup>27</sup> Péter Bokody, *Images-within-Images in Italian Painting (1250-1350): Reality and Reflexivity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Creighton E. Gilbert, "Grapes, Curtains, Human Beings: The Theory of Missed Mimesis," in *Künstlerischer Austausch = Artistic exchange: Akten des XXVIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte, Berlin, 15.-20. Juli 1992*, ed. Thomas W. Gaehtgens (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 414; Sarah Blake McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance. The Legacy of the Natural History* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 107.

<sup>29</sup> Norman Land, "Giotto's Fly, Cimabue's Gesture, and a *Madonna and Child* by Carlo Crivelli," *Source* 15, no. 4 (1996): 11-15; Degler, *Parergon*, 71-81; Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 181-5.

<sup>30</sup> Antonio di Piero Averlino, called Filarete, *Treatise on Architecture*, trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), book 23, f. 181 r., 309.

an assemblage of *all'antica* ornament and quotations from Donatello's reliefs, reveals his intimate knowledge of Squarcionism.<sup>31</sup>

## Against naturalism

Crivelli never chose between Venetian materiality or Paduan illusion. Instead he synthesised them to produce a cogent tension between object and image. This hybrid pictorial language was especially appreciated in the Marche, where he attracted commissions for Franciscan and Dominican churches, often financed (at least in part) by the local aristocracy. As I outline in Chapter One, the Marche was a remote region where the rituals of devotional and festive life were especially rich. Distanced from the dominant cultural centres of Florence, Venice and Urbino, in the Marche sensory spirituality was a concern over the humanist pursuit of antiquity or scientific discovery,<sup>32</sup> although, as I will show in Chapter Two, this did not preclude intellectual life from flourishing in other ways. Crivelli's hybrid systems of representation appealed to the mendicants' scholastic style of devotion, in which metaphor and paradox were productive ways of contemplating the incomprehensible God.<sup>33</sup> In such an environment, the emphatic unreality of painting nurtured the understanding that God's essence resided not in the image, but in a higher reality that could be fathomed only in the beholder's imagination.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the clearest example of Crivelli's intention that we should acknowledge his artifice is the painted swag of apples and pears draped across the *Vision of the Blessed Gabriele* (c.1489; **fig. 11**). This casts a painted shadow onto the sky, betraying its fiction. It was, perhaps, for this reason that Crivelli's signatures could be displayed so prominently in devotional paintings: his role as a facilitator between the viewer and the sacred was of value to the patrons who commissioned his work.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen J. Campbell, "The Virgin and Child with Infants Bearing Symbols of the Passion," in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, 146-9.

<sup>32</sup> Leopardi, "Aesthetic Hybrids," 99-143; Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 23-65.

<sup>33</sup> For a case study on abstraction in painting and its appeal to Dominican thought, see Georges Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>34</sup> Klaus Krüger, "Medium and Imagination: Aesthetic Aspects of Trecento Panel Painting," in *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento*, ed. Victor M. Schmidt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 56-81.

<sup>35</sup> See App. One. Most other painters of this period signed with less frequency than Crivelli, and integrated their signatures within the painted scene in more discreet ways. See Louisa Chevalier Matthew, "The Painter's Presence: Signatures in Venetian Renaissance Pictures," *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 4: 616-48.

In Crivelli's time, God's ineffability was investigated vigorously by theologians, including the influential German cardinal, philosopher and mathematician, Nicholas of Cusa (1404-64). Drawing on the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (active c.500 AD), his treatise *On Learned Ignorance* (1440) specifies that in order to come closer to envisaging God, the soul must ascend beyond rational, empirical reality, and enter a state of 'darkness' that Dionysius called *irrationalis et amens*.<sup>36</sup> This suggests that images that expressed paradox were more effective in enabling the beholder to imagine the divine realm than ones that imitated natural laws. According to Klaus Krüger, it became more pressing for devotional paintings to introduce tensions between appearance and reality just at the moment in the Trecento when painters discovered mimetic techniques of representation.<sup>37</sup> Giotto's images-within-images are evidence of this shift.<sup>38</sup> The preference for metapictorial modes of representation for religious subjects continued well into the fifteenth century, when the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius and Nicolas of Cusa entered mainstream thought through the sermons of preachers such as Bernardino da Siena (1380-1444).<sup>39</sup>

This thesis will draw upon Cusa's writings as a way of exploring the connections between Crivelli and contemporary theology. Although Cusa often made use of art and artists in his sermons and writings, few art historians have made connections between his theology and the art of his time. Charles Carman has argued that Cusa's ideas are linked to those of his exact contemporary, the Florentine humanist Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472). For Carman, the way in which linear perspective articulates a finite reality, while also pointing to an invisible space beyond, links the natural world with God's infinite, ineffable nature.<sup>40</sup> Golsenne has applied the same theory to his analysis of Crivelli's *Annunciation with Saint Emidius* (**fig. 2**), whose visual structure he sees as reflecting Cusa's theory of Incarnation, when God became human.<sup>41</sup> While I accept Carman and Golsenne's arguments, I would add that there were other ways in which painting, and Crivelli's work specifically, encouraged the viewer to connect the natural world with the invisible sacred, as I will demonstrate in Chapters Five and Six. While perspective was one solution, another was to negate Alberti's optical system entirely in favour of spatial distortions and exaggerated

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<sup>36</sup> Jasper Hopkins, "Interpretative Study," in *Nicholas of Cusa's Dialectical Mysticism. Text, Translation and Interpretative Study of De Visione Dei*, trans. Jasper Hopkins, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1996), 4.

<sup>37</sup> Krüger, "Medium and Imagination," 76.

<sup>38</sup> Bokody, *Images-within-Images*.

<sup>39</sup> See Chs. Five and Six.

<sup>40</sup> Carman, *Leon Battista Alberti and Nicholas Cusanus: Towards an Epistemology of Vision for Italian Renaissance Art and Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

<sup>41</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 210-212.

artifice. When these are paired with reality effects such as *trompe-l'oeil* and details in relief, it generates a similar tension between what can be grasped by the senses and what evades comprehension.

The hard-edged forms of Cosmé Tura (c.1430-1495), Zoppo and Niccolò Maestro di Ancona (active c.1472-c.1511), for the most part painters of religious subjects, represent the antithesis of the ideal described by Alberti in *De Pictura* (1435), where he encouraged painters to use “almost invisible lines” to avoid what could appear like “cracks” in the picture surface.<sup>42</sup> The painted illusion of cracks, which can be read as both on the surface of Crivelli’s paintings and within the pictorial scene, including the V&A *Madonna* (**fig. 1**), are arguably a rebuttal of Alberti’s painting system that strove above all to preserve naturalism. Like the painting by an unknown Ferrarese artist (c.1470/80; **fig. 12**), where painted parchment covering a fictive frame has been torn away to reveal a sacred vision of the Virgin and Child, the visionary appearance of Crivelli’s V&A *Virgin and Child* is fractured by the crack in the surface of the parapet upon which the Christ Child sits. As Krüger observed of the Ferrarese painting, “the distinction between reality and pictorial representation is reflected in the image itself, by way of a perceptual discontinuity.”<sup>43</sup>

While artifice in renaissance painting is often associated with the sixteenth-century movement known as Mannerism, the idea that deliberate artifice flourished in the fifteenth century has been little explored. Stephen Campbell’s work on Cosmè Tura demonstrates that the self-reflexive potential of painting appealed to intellectually conscious artists, often working away from the dominant cultural centres.<sup>44</sup> Naturalism, which attempts to minimise evidence of fabrication by holding a mirror up to nature, has no place in the art of Tura or Crivelli. As such, their modes are opposed conceptually to the art of high renaissance painters such as Leonardo, who championed painting as an intellectual activity, and sought to eliminate traces of his labour so that his work would appear as an autonomous creation.<sup>45</sup> However, as Campbell has observed of Crivelli’s work, “there appears to be no claim on behalf of the intellect or *ingegno* that is not also a claim on behalf of the hand.”<sup>46</sup>

Crivelli’s interest in the problem of pictorial representation was accompanied by a heightened attention towards the processes of making. His virtuosity was received with

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<sup>42</sup> Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. Cecil Grayson (1972; repr., London: Penguin Books, 2004), 65.

<sup>43</sup> Klaus Krüger, “Andrea Mantegna: Painting’s Mediality,” in “Andrea Mantegna: Making Art (History),” eds. Stephen J. Campbell and Jérémie Koering, special issue, *Art History* 37, no. 2 (2014): 226.

<sup>44</sup> Campbell, *Cosme Tura of Ferrara: Style, Politics and the Renaissance City 1450-1495* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 9-27; “Pictura and Scriptura. Cosmè Tura and Style as Courtly Performance,” *Art History* 19, no. 2 (1996): 223-53.

<sup>45</sup> See Chap. Five, 179-82.

<sup>46</sup> Campbell, “On the Importance of Crivelli,” in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, 34.

enthusiasm by his audiences in the Marche, where goldsmithing, prized for its complicated technical procedures and the intrinsic value of its materials, reigned above all other arts, as I will explore in Chapter One. In the early modern period, members of the elite, fascinated by the secrets and skills that underpinned technical processes, would visit the *botteghe* of celebrated artisans.<sup>47</sup> For the artisans, such visits were a chance to display their ingenuity, and receive recognition for their craft. In Ascoli Piceno, the statutes of 1377, in force for the entire Quattrocento, stated that goldsmiths were the only artisans allowed to keep their workshops open during religious festivals.<sup>48</sup> Presumably, this was so that Ascoli could boast of its prestigious craft tradition to the visitors who flocked to the town on the major feast days. Crivelli observed this dynamic, both emulating the aesthetic of goldsmiths work and emphasising his capacity to conjure painted figuration. His knighthood, in all probability bestowed upon him in 1489 by the aristocratic Ferretti family, his patrons in Ancona, was a recognition of his genius, one that he proudly declared by signing himself as *miles*, knight, from this date.<sup>49</sup>

Although humanists in Florence were beginning to promote painting as the superior art for its ability to imitate nature — a discourse now known as the *'paragone'* — the distinction between the 'low' and 'high' arts was not widely recognised in Italy during Crivelli's time.<sup>50</sup> The visual arts were part of a broad group of activities that required knowledge of a technical process.<sup>51</sup> Translated as *ars* by the Romans, the word *techne* was used by the Greeks to identify the skill and knowledge of the artisan, whether painter, carpenter, mathematician, poet, philosopher, botanist or astronomer. Henry Staten describes *techne* as

the historical residue of a long process of human effort that gives rise to a specific configuration of lines of force, resulting in part from how a given corner of the system of nature *is* in itself, and in part from the way the elements of that corner are chipped at, moved around and reassembled by human beings.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Christina Neilson, "Demonstrating Ingenuity: The Display and Concealment of Knowledge in Renaissance Artists' Workshops," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 19, no. 1 (2016): 63-91.

<sup>48</sup> Maria Elma Grelli, "Festa, giostra e moda in Ascoli tra Trecento e Quattrocento: prosopografia e 'liturgia del potere,'" in *Ascoli ai tempi dell'antica Quintana, 1377-1496. Atti del convegno di studi sui giochi storici del 19-20, novembre 2011*, eds., Bernardo Nardi and Stefano Papetti (Ascoli Piceno: Tipografia Tacconi, 2012), 66-7.

<sup>49</sup> Andrea Di Lorenzo, "Carlo Crivelli ad Ancona," in *Pittori ad Ancona nel Quattrocento*, eds. Andrea De Marchi and Matteo Mazzalupi (Milano: Federico Motta Editore, 2008), 314-16.

<sup>50</sup> Christiane J. Hessler, *Zum Paragone: Malerei, Skulptur und Dichtung in der Rangstreitkultur des Quattrocento* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Sefy Hendler, *La guerre des arts: le Paragone peinture-sculpture en Italie XVe – XVIIe siècle* (Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2013).

<sup>51</sup> Rebecca Zorach, "Renaissance Theory: A Selective Introduction," in *Renaissance Theory*, eds. James Elkins and Robert Williams, The Art Seminars series (New York and London: Routledge, 2008), 17-21.

<sup>52</sup> Staten, *Techne Theory: A New Language for Art* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 13.

Crivelli's *techne* adhered to the traditional materials and techniques of panel painting, used since the earliest icon painters, operating at the time of the Gospels. The making of an icon painting was, as the icon historian Richard Temple writes, "a re-enactment of the Incarnation."<sup>53</sup> So while painting was a *techne* along with all other kinds of skilled practice, it was set apart by its spiritual component, and the central role pictures played in religious devotion. As Cennino Cennini (c.1370-c.1440) wrote in the *Libro dell'Arte* (late 1390s), painting was distinguished from the other professions for its role in making manifest "invisible things hiding in the shadow of ones in nature."<sup>54</sup> This made it second only to poetry, as intellectual activities that enabled the artist to compose, "according to his imagination."

It is not easy to regain a sense of the original value attached to Crivelli's artistic process, as we have been conditioned to understand art as an object possessing an 'aura' that has very little to do with the labour that went into its making. The contemporary unease with craftsmanship was first codified in the eighteenth century by the philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who saw beauty as a disinterested and universal sensation, sometimes generated by art objects but fundamentally divorced from their materiality.<sup>55</sup> The changing meaning of the word artifice demonstrates this paradigm shift in our relationship with the object-subject dichotomy. The modern interpretation of artifice as trickery did not emerge until the seventeenth century;<sup>56</sup> in Crivelli's day, artifice (*arteficio*) - the joining of *ars* (art) and *facere* (making) - meant ingenuity. For instance, Alberti describes Brunelleschi's "*arteficio*" in constructing the dome of Florence Cathedral "without the aid of beams of elaborate wooden supports."<sup>57</sup> In 1598, it could also mean "arte, knowledge, skill, workmanship."<sup>58</sup> Thus, the display of skill in art was to be celebrated, not something to be suspicious of.

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<sup>53</sup> Richard Temple, "The Painting of Icons," in *Doors of Perception: Icons and their Spiritual Significance*, John Baggley (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 99.

<sup>54</sup> Cennino, *Cennino Cennini's Il Libro Dell'Arte: A New English Translation and Commentary with Italian Transcription*, trans. Lara Broecke (London: Archetype Publications, 2015), 20.

<sup>55</sup> Karen Ann Long, *Chaos and Cosmos: On the Image in Aesthetics and Art History* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 66-68.

<sup>56</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, accessed 18 November 2019, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/11206#eid38521556>.

<sup>57</sup> Alberti, *De Pictura (Redazione Volgare)*, ed. Lucia Bertolini (Florence: Polistampa, 2011), 204; Alberti, *On Painting*, 35.

<sup>58</sup> Florio, *A Worlde of Wordes, or Most copious, and exact Dictionarie in Italian and English* (London: Arnold Hatfield for Edward Blount, 1598), 28.

## A certain incompatibility of elements

Since the beginning of our discipline, the art historian's desire to make stylistic groupings has been the dominant method for making sense of our subject. We have developed categories for visual characteristics we identify as belonging to certain styles, and we have used these styles to chart artistic progress across time. However, problems arise when we consider that different styles could flourish simultaneously in different places.<sup>59</sup> To maintain this narrative of progress, it was necessary to label those regions where art displayed different characteristics from what was deemed progressive as backward, or of little aesthetic interest.

Crivelli's art is particularly resistant to a neat, 'progressive,' categorisation. Even labelling his works as merely paintings is problematic, considering that his altarpieces and small devotional panels often include real or glass gems, and applied ornament in relief, such as rope, and were tooled, carved, and moulded like works of goldsmiths' art or sculpture. A highly receptive artist, Crivelli constructed his work via a process of what Thomas Golsenne aptly calls "bricolage," producing a novel pictorial idiom that appropriates compositional ideas, motifs, and styles from the various places in which he worked.<sup>60</sup> The trope in the scholarship since the late-nineteenth century has been to describe Crivelli's Venetianness — his use of gold, gems and lustrous colour, and his loyalty to the polyptych — as gothic, byzantine, or both, while the Paduan aspects of Crivelli's art, which all engage with generating illusion in various ways, are described as renaissance in character.<sup>61</sup> Thus the Venetian characteristics belong to the centuries-old language of religious art, and the Paduan to the new humanist aesthetic. However, since these disparate ways of working are merged, Crivelli's art is stylistically hybrid, as Liliana Leopardi has argued.<sup>62</sup>

This produced what could be called an ideological entanglement. Crivelli was a craftsman, but a genius craftsman with a strong sense of his own authorship. All of his works depict religious subjects, and they employ the visual and material rhetoric of Christian art (gold, gems, hieratic figures), but they also engage with the classical world through their

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<sup>59</sup> Peter Dent, "Time and the Image: Art at an Epochal Threshold," in *Medieval or Early Modern: The Value of a Traditional Historical Division*, ed. Ronald Hutton (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015), 146-8.

<sup>60</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 212-216.

<sup>61</sup> For example, Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavalcaselle, *A History of Painting in North Italy*, vol. 1, *Venice, Padua, Vicenza, Verona, Ferrara, Milan, Friuli, Brescia from the Fourteenth to the Sixteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1871), 86; Bernard Berenson, *Venetian Painting in America. The Fifteenth Century* (New York: Frederic Fairchild Sherman, 1916), 18-19.

<sup>62</sup> Leopardi, "Aesthetic Hybrids."

pervasive use of *all'antica* ornament and references to ancient literary tropes. They deliberately limit naturalism by emphasising the artificial nature of painting, but engage with nature by depicting the natural world and using nature's raw materials. Painting is brought to a virtuoso level of illusion, and yet other artistic media, particularly those associated with Christian practice — metalwork and textiles — are emulated in numerous ways. In other words, Crivelli's work dissolves the boundary between the so-called 'medieval' and 'renaissance' styles. It is little surprise, therefore, that he was ignored by the father of art history, Giorgio Vasari (1511-74), whose *Vite* (1550, 1568) articulated a story of artists, for the most part painters, through a Florentine lens of progress. Vasari's notion that art was reborn with Giotto after the 'darkness' of the middle ages set the example for separating the renaissance from what came before. Since Vasari's day, art historians have defined this shift in various ways.

In the twentieth century, our narrative moved away from medieval decline and renaissance rebirth towards an ontological shift about how visual objects function. While Walter Benjamin described a transition from the "cult value" of miracle-working objects to the "exhibition value" of works of art designed for display,<sup>63</sup> Michael Baxandall tracked a change over the course of the fifteenth century from the request for "precious materials," to the request for the "skilful working of materials," in contracts between patrons and painters.<sup>64</sup> Hans Belting gave an influential account of the shift from the 'medieval' image of Christian devotion to the aesthetic work of art in the reformation and renaissance periods.<sup>65</sup> Seeking to move away from such dualisms, in their 2010 book, *Anachronic Renaissance*, Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood described a dialectic in which the "substitutional" and "performative" origins of artefact production inflect differently in each work.<sup>66</sup> While the "substitutional" perpetuates an authoritative mode of making an image, such as an icon, the "performative" insists on a single maker's authorship, and the originality of their product. Their framework accepts that these two modes can be seen in single objects, and thus that history and its art can be "anachronic." Many art historians would agree that most works of art of the late medieval and early modern period present characteristics that fall within

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<sup>63</sup> Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility (Third Version)," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings 1938-1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, MA and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 257.

<sup>64</sup> Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 14-23.

<sup>65</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>66</sup> Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010); Nagel and Wood, "Towards a New Model of Renaissance Anachronism," *The Art Bulletin* 87, no. 3 (2005): 403-15.

apparently opposing historical categories. The rise of the terms ‘late medieval’ and ‘early modern’, which acknowledge the fluid and often intersecting boundaries of historical periods, is part of this conceptual shift. However, the same dualistic statements are often repeated. For instance, a year after the publication of *Anachronic Renaissance*, Caroline Walker Bynum defined the difference between medieval and renaissance art as a question of “objectness” versus “self-conscious painterly illusion.”<sup>67</sup>

In Crivelli’s work, there is a total overlapping of image and art, material and skill, substitutional and performative, object and illusion. His paintings demonstrate the futility of attempting to mark a clear boundary between medieval and renaissance. This partly explains the recent surge of interest in Crivelli: he is an excellent case study for revisionist approaches in art history. Most twentieth-century writers on Crivelli understood that his work collapses discipline dualisms; though, working under the shadow of influential figures for whom Vasari’s narrative remained paradigmatic, this was not always easy to articulate.

In 1930, Alice Child Jenckes, an occasional writer in Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts bulletin, saw Crivelli’s hybridity as the most compelling aspect of his art, observing, “this very confusion of influences testifies to the individuality of his genius, which could adapt so many varied traditions to its own formula.”<sup>68</sup> However, her open-mindedness was not shared by more influential colleagues in the field, including Bernard Berenson (1865-1959), who famously left Crivelli out of his survey of Venetian painting, for fear that his work would disrupt his teleological narrative.<sup>69</sup> Writing in 1961 after visiting the exhibition *Carlo Crivelli e i crivelleschi*, curated by Pietro Zampetti at the Palazzo Ducale in Venice, Andrew Martindale observed,

A certain incompatibility of elements is in fact one of Crivelli’s most characteristic features. He could paint with a graphic realism derived from Mantegna; he was aware of some requirements of perspective, even if they were applied somewhat erratically; and he played with foreshortening like a newly acquired toy – with varying success. But in his altarpieces through the extensive use of a gold ground, through the carved wooden frame, and through the copious application of raised

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<sup>67</sup> Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 58. Jean Campbell also faults Bynum’s account, noting that in Crivelli’s *Mary Magdalene* (c.1480, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam) “there is no firm line to be drawn between illusionistic representation and objective presentation.” C. Jean Campbell, “Grace in the Making: Carlo Crivelli and the Techniques of Devotion,” in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, 42-4.

<sup>68</sup> Alice Child Jenckes, “Paintings by Carlo Crivelli in Boston and Cambridge,” *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts* 28, no. 166 (1930): 22-23.

<sup>69</sup> Bernard Berenson, *The Venetian Painters of the Renaissance* (New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1894), v-vi. For the passage and a commentary see Campbell, “On the Importance of Crivelli,” 11-13. Campbell incorrectly states that Berenson was writing in 1952 under the influence of a Modernist agenda.

gesso decoration, he continued to stress the decorative splendour of the surface in a way characteristic of Antonio da Murano and the previous generation.<sup>70</sup>

Martindale's assessment of Crivelli in the rest of the article is, like this passage, ambivalent. He admires Crivelli's independent spirit and grapples impressively with what makes Crivelli's art distinctive, but this is accompanied by what feels like an obligation to respect art-historical boundaries by describing Crivelli as idiosyncratic and naïve. Although Crivelli's paintings are "distasteful" to Martindale, they have a "compelling fascination," which threatens to expose art history's frameworks as unworkable.

Crivelli's work uncovers other deep-seated prejudices. Our privileging of Italian art from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, and the medium of painting, makes him a 'false friend.' His altarpieces and small works for private devotion are of what we might call undeniable 'quality,' but they emulate the exaggerated anatomy and stylization of German prints and polychrome sculpture, denying the narrative that painting replaced sculpture as the authoritative medium in the fifteenth century, or that Italian art was stimulated by its own, purely national, developments.<sup>71</sup> They make a virtue of the conventions of tempera painting and gold leaf, ignoring the increasing preference for oil and canvas. And, unlike most of his contemporaries, Crivelli's oeuvre is devoid of portraits or mythological subjects, which are seen to indicate an interest in the secular, intellectual life that defines our notion of the renaissance. While it might be argued that such works existed but are now lost, Crivelli's ornament, which constitutes his language, could not have translated to a secular work, and besides this, there was a very limited market for such work in the Marche.<sup>72</sup> This was half of the issue: the Marche was removed from the main centres of artistic production – Florence, Venice and Urbino – and thus the historical context of Crivelli's work was neither interesting nor familiar, his patrons branded as naïve and unsophisticated. Crivelli's insistence on the devotional and ritual function of his paintings, and their intent to affect the viewer in a bodily way, deny the possibility of pure, abstract, secular painting that characterised the most advanced examples of renaissance art, according to the values promoted by Clement

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<sup>70</sup> Andrew Martindale, "Carlo Crivelli and the Venetian Exhibition of 1961," *The Burlington Magazine* 103, no. 703 (1961): 408.

<sup>71</sup> For two accounts that complicate this narrative, see Peter Dent, "The Late Medieval Action Figure and the Living Image," in *Dolls, Puppets, Sculptures and Living Images from the Middle Ages to the End of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Kamil Kopania (Białystok and Warsaw: Aleksander Zelwerowicz State Theatre Academy and the University of Warsaw, 2017), 18-32, esp. 30-31; Jeffrey Hamburger, "Seeing and Believing: The Suspicion of Sight and the Authentication of Vision in Late Medieval Art and Devotion," in *Imagination und Wirklichkeit. Zum Verhältnis von mentalen und realen Bildern in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Klaus Krüger and Alessandro Nova (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2000), 47-69, esp. 51-5.

<sup>72</sup> See n. 32, above.

Greenberg's modernist agenda.<sup>73</sup> As Rebecca Zorach put it, "the danger of objects that affect their viewers powerfully, in a bodily way, is that those objects — when they belong to the context of popular cult — are more likely to be downgraded as unworthy of the attentions of true art history."<sup>74</sup>

The patronizing attitude towards Crivelli that prevailed throughout the twentieth century culminated in Martin Davies' short monograph (1972), which opens "Carlo Crivelli is not one of the greatest painters. His work forms a backwater not contributing to the main streams of Italian Renaissance or other European painting."<sup>75</sup> Almost echoing Zorach, Davies wrote that Crivelli's work "provides an agreeable and high-class holiday far away from the great pictures and the aesthetic problems they pose. [. . .] General esteem for him is not dependent on any illuminating experiences, but on the simple, powerful attraction of his pictures."<sup>76</sup> For Davies, then Director of London's National Gallery, his paintings were a threat to good taste, moral judgement and serious scholarship because they solicited a visceral response in the viewer.<sup>77</sup>

## New formulas

When Berenson claimed in 1894 that "A formula that would, without distorting our entire view of Italian art in the fifteenth century, do full justice to such a painter as Carlo Crivelli does not exist," he left a tantalising challenge to future art historians.<sup>78</sup> In order to understand Crivelli's distinctive pictorial idiom, existing formulas had to be cast aside, as art historians developed new tools of study. It is, in this sense, interesting to note that the first nuanced interpretations of Crivelli's work came from individuals all involved in some way with contemporary art. Untroubled by the same prejudices as renaissance art historians, they looked at Crivelli's paintings with fresh eyes and sought to understand his way of working on its own terms. In 1965, the critic Suzi Gablik included Crivelli in her article on "meta-trompe-l'oeil" in twentieth-century art, noting that the Venetian artist's paintings, which she described as "supernaturalist reveries," incorporate real objects into the pictorial

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<sup>73</sup> For a discussion of how modernist values influence our understanding of renaissance art, see Zorach, "Renaissance Theory," 3-36.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>75</sup> Davies, *Carlo Crivelli* (London: The National Gallery, 1972), 3.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>77</sup> On the feminisation of Crivelli's work in art-historical discourse and its problems, see Timothy McCall, "The Gendering of *Libertas* and the International Gothic: Carlo Crivelli's *Ascoli Annunciation*," *Studies in Iconography* 30 (2009): 168-197.

<sup>78</sup> Berenson, *The Venetian Painters*, v-vi.

illusion in a similar way to works like John Latham's *Noit and Skoob* (1959), in which two books attached to the canvas become part of the picture.<sup>79</sup> In 1981 Audrey Flack gave a highly personal account of her response to Crivelli, to whom she felt "incurably attracted."<sup>80</sup> Writing as an artist, Flack's essay brilliantly captures the appeal of Crivelli's work for viewers uninhibited by art-historical prejudice. She writes, "the agitated line, the multiplicity of detail, the crowding of areas, jam-packed with objects, decorated, bejewelled, with gold leaf, impasto, exquisite designs – all combine to form the special eccentricities and magic of Carlo Crivelli."<sup>81</sup> She sees Crivelli as a passionate and empathetic communicator, who used his technical skills to move the viewer in a way that connects to her practice as one of the pioneers of photorealism. For Flack, Crivelli is a "Gothic, Baroque Super-Realist," whose work relates to Spanish polychrome sculpture.<sup>82</sup> She recognised that his art sat outside the elitist domain of art-historical respectability and chastised Martin Davies's judgements, which she wrote "reflect his own personal ethical, religious and social attitudes."<sup>83</sup> In 1988, unaware of Flack's contribution, the contemporary art curator Jonathan Watkins also countered Davies's attitude in his perceptive consideration of Crivelli's "illusionism," in which he described, for the first time, self-reflexive elements of Crivelli's art, such as the festoon that casts a shadow on the sky of *The Vision of the Blessed Gabriele* (**fig. 11**), declaring it a fiction.<sup>84</sup> As Watkins notes, Davies shamefully described this ingenious feature as "no more than conservatism of the artist's part, from earlier successes with Paduan swags against gold, etc."<sup>85</sup>

It was not until recently that scholars of early modern art took up the challenge of redefining Crivelli's place in art history by measuring his work against a set of values that respect both his intense engagement with the world of artisanal objects and the entrenched devotional functions of his art. However, this was not without false starts. It has become rather a cliché to criticise Ronald Lightbown's enormous 2004 study on Crivelli.<sup>86</sup> Lightbown's heavy and systematic application of iconography to each of Crivelli's surviving paintings makes for laborious reading, and sadly overshadows the many insights and discoveries his volume is peppered with. Although Crivelli's meta-pictorial language occupied a blind spot for Lightbown, his work is an indispensable source on the economic, social and religious history of the Marche region — indeed there are entire chapters dedicated to these subjects

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<sup>79</sup> Gablik, "Meta-trompe-l'oeil," *Art News* 64 (1965): 46-9.

<sup>80</sup> Flack, "On Carlo Crivelli," *Arts Magazine* 55 (June 1981): 94-5.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Watkins, "Untricking the Eye": 48-58.

<sup>85</sup> Davies, *Carlo Crivelli*, 30.

<sup>86</sup> See n. 4, above.

— and on the circumstances of each commission. His efforts have advanced our knowledge on Crivelli significantly; prior to Lightbown, Anna Bovero's (1961) and Pietro Zampetti's (1961; 1986) monographs, and those that came before them, focused on biography, stylistic influence, attribution and the reconstruction of fragmented polyptychs.<sup>87</sup> Liliana Leopardi's doctoral thesis (2007) was the first serious study of Crivelli's ornament, and its functions within the social context in which he worked.<sup>88</sup> Her analyses of Ascoli's statutes and the sermons of the Franciscan Observant, Giacomo della Marca (1391-1476), demonstrated that richness of material and ornament were commensurate with social status, and were thus an appropriate way of honouring the sacred.<sup>89</sup> The catalogue accompanying the 2009 exhibition at the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, curated by Emanuela Daffra, was novel for juxtaposing Crivelli's paintings with Anatolian carpets, silk cloths, reliquaries and ceramics.<sup>90</sup> Daffra's own brief introductory essay highlights possible collaborations between Crivelli and other craftsmen, and his interest in metalwork and fabrics, describing the Marche as "a world in which different techniques coexist and compete with one another."<sup>91</sup> The other essays and entries are valuable for understanding what objects may have been available to Crivelli, but they fail to consider such objects' relationship with his paintings in function or aesthetic. Rather, they treat Crivelli's paintings as visual catalogues, reductively using them to identify contemporary artefacts. The 2011 exhibition catalogue edited by Francesca Coltrinari and Alessandro Delpriori focuses on Crivelli's brother, Vittore (c.1440-1501/2), also in relation to Carlo. Vittore's paintings, characterised by deep pathos and their decorative take on his brother's style, covered the demand for altarpieces from smaller hilltop villages of the Marche (*castelli*). The exhibition and its catalogue, like the 2009 show and publication, makes intelligent interpretations of the contracts for Crivelli's paintings and the results of technical studies carried out in the lead up to the exhibition.<sup>92</sup>

The 2015 exhibition at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston and its catalogue edited by Stephen Campbell explicitly set out to address Crivelli's material and visual dialectics, as its title, *Ornament and Illusion*, suggests.<sup>93</sup> Along these lines, Alison

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<sup>87</sup> Bovero, *Tutta la pittura del Crivelli* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1961); Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli* (Milan: Martello, 1961); see n. 13, above.

<sup>88</sup> See n. 6, above.

<sup>89</sup> Liliana Leopardi, "'Ornamentis Secundum Condecentiam Sui Status': New Criteria for Assessing the *Ornato* in Crivelli's Paintings," in *New Studies on Old Masters: Essays in Renaissance Art in Honour of Colin Eisler*, eds. John Garton and Diane Wolfthal (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2011), 255-269.

<sup>90</sup> See n. 12, above.

<sup>91</sup> Emanuela Daffra, "Incantesimi per gli occhi," in Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 21.

<sup>92</sup> See n. 15, above.

<sup>93</sup> See n. 1, above.

Wright explored what she calls the “iconoclash” between mimetic paint and spiritual gold, while Jean Campbell described an anachronic conjoining of “illusionistic representation and objective presentation.”<sup>94</sup> By asserting the agency of Crivelli’s visual rhetoric, the exhibition rescued his work from the still-pervasive accounts of an eccentric style that was allowed to flourish in a stationary culture under conservative patronage.<sup>95</sup> Campbell’s introductory essay characterises the Marche as “a regional network joining the numerous trading and manufacturing towns of the region with rural sites of agricultural production and with the wider Mediterranean world [ . . .].”<sup>96</sup> He demonstrates that within this dynamic region of ethnic and cultural complexity, Crivelli’s evocation of the luxury arts, particularly textile production, complemented the social and economic values that his patrons placed on such items. However, the nature of catalogue essays written by distinct authors means that the findings of *Ornament and Illusion* are quite fragmentary; illuminating observations, about, for example, Crivelli’s visual references to local cult images, could not be fully investigated in terms of historical context or contemporary art-theoretical and religious debates.<sup>97</sup> This thesis builds on the findings of *Ornament and Illusion* with its sustained analysis of a small group of paintings, facilitated by close access to the National Gallery’s collection. While catalogues written to accompany exhibitions are necessarily limited in scope, my research, carried out within the context of a permanent collection, has enabled a deeper engagement with the objects.

Thomas Golsenne, whose catalogue essay in *Ornament and Illusion* offered a taste of his theoretical work for an Anglo-American audience, wrote the first monograph in French on Crivelli (2017).<sup>98</sup> Crivelli’s work is presented as a case for arguing that “the Renaissance does not mark a rupture from the Middle Ages, but the extensive paganisation of social life.”<sup>99</sup> The ‘material mysticism’ referenced in his title is offered as a lens through which to view the cognitive style of Crivelli’s audiences. Golsenne borrows the term from sociologist Michel Maffesoli, who defined it as “a paradoxical expression [ . . . ] made up of hedonism, of

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<sup>94</sup> Wright, “Crivelli’s Divine Materials,” in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, 59; Campbell, “Grace in the Making,” 43.

<sup>95</sup> For example, Lisa Monnas sees Crivelli’s “abundance of decorative ornament” as “catering to a more provincial clientele in the Marches.” Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters: Silk Fabrics in Italian and Northern Paintings 1300-1550* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 168.

<sup>96</sup> Campbell, “On the Importance of Crivelli,” 15.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 24; Campbell, “Grace in the Making,” 51-2; Wright, “Crivelli’s Divine Materials,” 74-6; Thomas Golsenne, “Portrait of the Artist as a Cucumber,” 90.

<sup>98</sup> See n. 1, above. For a review of this book, see App. Two.

<sup>99</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 16.

bodies, of objects, of images, of space [. . .] transmuted into mysticism [. . .].”<sup>100</sup> Golsenne also draws upon the work of Deleuze and other contemporary theorists to offer new insights into Crivelli’s paintings, while still grounding them in late-medieval socio-religious and philosophical thought. However, this broad viewpoint is often at the expense of a deeper engagement with the particular circumstances of each commission; Golsenne’s novel ideas would have been strengthened by using the evidence offered by contracts, and by sustained object analysis, both of which are lacking.

With the ‘material turn’ in the humanities, and increasing interest in forms of liminality, adornment and poetic devices in painting of the early modern period, Crivelli has featured in studies by scholars working on such themes, resulting in some nuanced analyses of his paintings.<sup>101</sup> For example, while Anna Degler sees Crivelli’s ornaments as *parerga* — elements peripheral to the main focus of the image, commenting upon and often interpreting it —,<sup>102</sup> Paul Hills has explored Crivelli’s analogies between the Virgin’s girdles and veils, and the Christ child’s swaddling, which produce an allegory about fertility and childbirth on the one hand, and the binding of the mortal body on the other.<sup>103</sup> Most recently, Alison Wright has examined Crivelli’s framing systems, which establish hierarchies between the holy figures, link heaven with physical reality, and assist the beholder to navigate his images spatially.<sup>104</sup>

Art historians have now developed a set of tools with which to grapple with Crivelli’s complex artistic statements. However, the results of recent ground-breaking work need to be reconciled with closer physical examination of the pictures and a fresh look at Crivelli’s creative practice within the cultural context of the Marche. Informed by technical analysis carried out at the National Gallery, and new research on Crivelli’s Dominican patrons and the artistic culture of Ascoli Piceno, this thesis will argue that Crivelli offered the beholder exquisitely crafted images with which to negotiate the relationship between heaven and earth. I will suggest that the medium of painting was, for Crivelli and his audiences, a shifting category and concept. While humanists asserted that painting was at the heart of all media — for Alberti it was “the mistress of all the arts or their principal ornament” — Crivelli’s work

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<sup>100</sup> Maffesoli, *The Contemplation of the World: Figures of Community Style*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 32.

<sup>101</sup> For an overview on the ‘material turn’ in the humanities, see Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>102</sup> Degler, *Parergon*. See esp. 83-6, 132-7, 159-63.

<sup>103</sup> Hills, *Veiled Presence: Body and Drapery from Giotto to Titian* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 92-3.

<sup>104</sup> Wright, *Frame Work: Honour and Ornament in Italian Renaissance Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019), 170-9, 194-6.

explores medial interrelationships in a different way.<sup>105</sup> His paintings draw upon other artistic media, incorporating aspects of their materiality, and their visual modes. In doing so, they strive to function in similar ways to such objects, as I will show in Chapters One and Four. Crivelli's paintings, with their meticulously crafted surfaces, often reflective and three-dimensional, are visual objects. In Crivelli's work, the picture plane is not a transparent "window" onto a life-like scene, as Alberti might have had it, but a concrete interface with the divine realm. Crivelli's art does, however, participate in the natural world, even if it does not reflect it. Using nature's raw matter, Crivelli's paintings reconstruct nature anew to configure a paradoxical reality, inhabited by the holy beings he depicts. My argument, therefore, is that Crivelli makes painting extend beyond itself, towards other media, towards the viewer's reality and towards a celestial sphere. The possibilities of what painting can do under Crivelli's influence — like his technical capacities — appear to be limitless.

As well as drawing upon the findings of previous Crivelli studies, this thesis is informed by several other strands of scholarship. A current trend in art history, led by such scholars as Pamela H. Smith, Anne Dunlop and Verity Platt, focuses upon the meaning of materials and processes of making, and their relationship to the natural world.<sup>106</sup> Using an interdisciplinary approach incorporating technical art history and the natural sciences, their work has addressed topics including "material mimesis," in which one material imitates the visual properties of another,<sup>107</sup> the performativity of particular materials, such as stone, in ritual and devotion,<sup>108</sup> and the behaviour of matter — oil, for example — in artistic process.<sup>109</sup> My ideas are also influenced by the work of art historians who have explored the impact of particular media on Christian practice. Sculpture and relief sculpture have been the main focus of their work, although investigations into 'visuality' and 'materiality,' sight and the senses, and their interrelationships, address similar themes.<sup>110</sup> My work also

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<sup>105</sup> Alberti, *On Painting*, 61.

<sup>106</sup> Christy Anderson, Ann Dunlop and Pamela H. Smith, eds., *The Matter of Art: Materials, Practices, Cultural Logics, c.1250-1750* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014); Platt, "Of Sponges and Stones: Matter and Ornament in Roman Painting," in *Ornament and Figure in Graeco-Roman Art: Rethinking Visual Ontologies in Classical Antiquity*, eds. Nikolaus Dietrich and Michael Squire (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 246-58.

<sup>107</sup> Marta Ajmar, "The Renaissance in Material Culture: Material Mimesis as Force and Evidence of Globalization," in *The Routledge Handbook of Archaeology and Globalization*, ed. Tamar Hodos (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), 669-86.

<sup>108</sup> Piers Baker-Bates and Elena Calvillo, eds., *Almost Eternal: Painting on Stone and Material Innovation in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018).

<sup>109</sup> Ann-Sophie Lehmann, "The Matter of the Medium: Some Tools for an Art Theoretical Interpretation of Materials," in Anderson, Dunlop and Smith, *The Matter of Art*, 27-36.

<sup>110</sup> Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2002); Donal Cooper and Marika Leino, eds., *Depth of Field: Relief Sculpture in Renaissance Italy* (Bern:

dovetails with those studies that see art as having agency in the social sphere, particularly in religious devotion. Working in the wake of Alfred Gell, scholars including Hans Belting, Klaus Krüger and Jeffery Hamburger have assessed art as an active mediator in religious practice.<sup>111</sup> Finally, I am interested in the scholarship on various kinds of liminality, whether meta-painting, images-within-images, illusionism, *trompe-l'oeil*, *parerga* or framing devices, in which the artistic act is self-staged.<sup>112</sup> Crivelli's devices, such as the fly, have already received critical attention; in my work, I see artifice, as well as his emphasis on the made nature of his art, as part of the self-reflexive mechanism of Crivelli's paintings. Of course, the various scholarly strands I have described are complementary, and there are also convergences between them, a situation reflected in my own work.

The methodology and structure of this thesis take inspiration from Crivelli's own practice and the functions of his work. Crivelli's paintings are composite objects, combining imagery collected from his travels and the environments for which his work was destined. This dictates how we look at his pictures in a physical sense. It is telling that close-up details of Crivelli's paintings are often reproduced in publications, or photographed by museums visitors. His images lend themselves to being viewed in fragments, which I argue would have informed the devotional practice of his original beholders. Thus, every chapter other than the last contains case studies on distinct elements of Crivelli's vocabulary: orphreys, bird designs for textiles, pseudo-script, gems and halos all receive separate attention.

The thesis is divided into two parts. In the first, I explore Crivelli's response to the values of his adopted town, Ascoli Piceno, where there was no established tradition of painting, but where luxury artistic media played a fundamental role in festive and devotional life. While Crivelli is often seen as a repetitive artist whose practice remains constant throughout his career, I will show that he was highly receptive to the environments in which he worked, and that each work is site-specific. Contradicting Golsenne's view that Crivelli's sole aim was to generate a cult around himself,<sup>113</sup> I will suggest that tapping into his audiences' 'cognitive style,' as Michael Baxandall might have said, was a central goal, and

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Peter Lang, 2007); Christopher Lakey, *Sculptural Seeing: Relief, Optics and the Rise of Perspective in Medieval Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2019).

<sup>111</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*; Krüger, "Medium and Imagination"; Hamburger, "Seeing and Believing."

<sup>112</sup> Bokody, *Images-within-Images*; Watkins, "Untricking the Eye"; Degler, *Parergon*; Wright, *Frame Work*. Lorenzo Pericolo has described metapainting as the "self-staging of painting." Pericolo, "What is Metapainting? *The Self-Aware Image* Twenty Years Later," in *The Self-Aware Image: An Insight into Early Modern Metapainting*, Victor Stoichita, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Harvey Miller, 2015): 12.

<sup>113</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 150.

one that helped to make his paintings spiritually-effective.<sup>114</sup> Unlike Golsenne, I argue that Crivelli's work can accommodate both artist and viewer, and that in fact the dialogue between them is an essential mechanism of his art.

Chapter One assesses how the ritual and material culture of Ascoli informed Crivelli's mixed-media altarpieces for the cathedral of Sant'Emidio and the church of San Domenico. I will explore the interactions between Crivelli's paintings, local crafts and some of the town's most precious objects, in technique, design and function. Chapter Two investigates Crivelli's Dominican patrons, and the possible ways in which their theology and spiritual activities conditioned their encounters with the two altarpieces that Crivelli made for their church in Ascoli. While Crivelli's response to Franciscan ideology is highlighted in the scholarship, his sensitivity towards the Dominicans' image requirements has been neglected. The devotional practice of the prior of San Domenico, Fra Costanzo da Fabriano, and the hitherto unexplored contents of the convent's once famous library, shed new light on Crivelli's polyptychs. Chapter Three examines Crivelli's working methods by tracing the making of the larger polyptych for San Domenico. Drawing upon the results of technical analysis performed at the National Gallery, I will present new evidence about Crivelli's materials and techniques, his workshop, and how he made a virtue out of the restrictions imposed by his patrons. In addition, I will suggest ways in which the rigour of Crivelli's craft was appreciated by his audiences.

Part Two investigates how Crivelli's paintings connect the earthly and heavenly spheres, focusing on the interplay between their material and pictorial components. The tension between accessibility and inaccessibility to the sacred played out across medieval and early modern Christian culture in various ways. In visual objects, it was often manifested through the simultaneous assertion of opposites. Crivelli's work demonstrates a heightened attention towards the possibilities of play on the idea of a picture as both a material object in the world and an evocation of the divine. He appears to have reflected, perhaps indirectly, upon theological thought that asserts the conjoining of opposites: the Incarnation, when God became human, and messages such as Nicholas of Cusa's that "the visible universe is a faithful reflection of the invisible."<sup>115</sup> The *Crucifixion* (**fig. 13**), in which the sky splits between a painted, terrestrial landscape below and a gold-leaf, celestial field above, reflects this idea of Christ's simultaneous humanity and divinity, as well as earth and heaven as contiguous, through the conjoining of paint and gold.

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<sup>114</sup> Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 36-40.

<sup>115</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, trans. Germain Heron (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 1954), book 1, 11:25.

Chapter Four is a study of the role that relief plays in Crivelli's work, and its interactions with painted figuration. Long seen as a sign of his *retardataire* approach, ever since Ruskin described "the embossed projecting jewels of Carlo Crivelli" as "ignorant work" in 1871, scholars are only now beginning to realise the sophistication of Crivelli's relief.<sup>116</sup> I analyse the optical system it uses, hitherto ignored in the literature, and I propose possible interpretations of how it manifests, and why. Chapter Five examines what I have called Crivelli's 'painted worlds,' in which artifice implies a reality beyond what is depicted, and where hard-edged forms articulated with tempera paint hint at the limits of representation. While Crivelli's use of thresholds and *trompe-l'oeil* is well known, I explore other ways in which the artist places barriers between the beholder and the subject of their devotion. In Chapter Six I argue that Crivelli's work engages with nature in a way that is distinct from those paintings art historians call 'naturalistic.' Rather than present the natural world in mirror form, Crivelli reconstructs nature anew, assembling rich microcosms which frame the sacred figures. Within these microcosms, different types of figuration, matter and ornament echo each other, demonstrating an artistic structure that parallels the workings of the natural world. Crivelli's paintings, therefore, do not present an unmediated vision of the celestial realm, as this could not be known or pictured, but a fictional imagining of this realm through the lens of transfigured reality.

This thesis aims to provide a broad picture of Crivelli's activities, his audiences' responses, and the possible ways we might read his often arcane paintings. By examining them from multiple viewpoints, and by allowing close observation of the objects themselves to guide the direction of this research, it brings us closer to an intellectually independent artist who produced some of the fifteenth-century's most aesthetically daring works of art.

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<sup>116</sup> John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, vol. 22, eds. Edward T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1906), 47.

## **Chapter One**

### **Craft and Devotion in Ascoli: The Formation of a New Pictorial Language**

Although it has often been said that Crivelli reproduced the lessons of his Venetian and Paduan origins throughout his career in the Marche, without stimulation from local sources, a transformation occurred in his art between 1468, the date of his first signed altarpiece for Massa Fermana (**fig. 7**), and 1473, his first altarpiece for Ascoli Piceno (**fig. 14**).<sup>1</sup> The earlier altarpiece is faithful to the styles of Crivelli's teachers in the Veneto: the slender, full-length saints with their gentle *pastiglia* ornaments and the untooled gold ground recall the Vivarini workshop's altarpieces of the late 1440s and early 1450s, especially the *Charity Triptych* (**fig. 5**) and the polyptych for the church of San Girolamo della Certosa, Bologna (1450, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna). However, the Baptist's bulging musculature and the severe anatomical specificity of all the figures, as well as the hard marble surfaces, the fruit and candle accessories, testify to Crivelli's knowledge of Squarcionism in Padua. The Virgin's attire, her facial features and the Christ Child's are very close to Squarcione's *Virgin and Child* of c.1460 (**fig. 15**). The colour scheme, the candle, apple and red cloth-of-honour suggest that Crivelli knew and admired this very painting, or ones like it. The predella scenes indicate Crivelli's study of Mantegna's predella of the San Zeno Altarpiece.<sup>2</sup> Crivelli's works of the early 1470s continue to draw heavily upon his formation. For example, his *Saint George and the Dragon* from the Porto San Giorgio altarpiece (**fig. 16**) shares a common source with Cosimo Tura's organ shutters in Ferrara Cathedral.<sup>3</sup> This is likely to be the sheet of the same subject in Jacopo Bellini's British Museum sketchbook (**fig. 17**).<sup>4</sup>

Crivelli's altarpiece for Ascoli's cathedral is somewhat different (**fig. 14**). It demonstrates a heightened attention towards the rendition of rich and ornate ecclesiastical regalia and contemporary fashions, captured in gold leaf, sculptural *pastiglia* and luminous colour. Silk cloth and goldsmiths' work are observed with greater specificity than ever before. Crivelli also introduced new techniques and iconography: he inserted real gems into the surfaces of the panels; placed a cucumber on the garland near the Virgin's head; and applied

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<sup>1</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 144: Crivelli's painting "was modern with the modernity of the 1450s in Venice and Padua. Because of this relatively stagnant artistic atmosphere, Crivelli was to receive no stimulus from local innovations."

<sup>2</sup> See Introduction, n. 25; Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 103-8; Tosato, "La prima attività di Crivelli," 64.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen J. Campbell, "The Porto San Giorgio Altarpiece, 1470," in *Ornament and Illusion*, 155.

<sup>4</sup> Debora Tosato, "La prima attività di Crivelli," 66.

a distinctive bird design in gold leaf to the textiles that ornament the most important figures - Saint Emidius and the Virgin and Child. This chapter argues that Crivelli's style flourished particularly in Ascoli Piceno, by exploring how local artisanal traditions and objects of prestige informed his new aesthetic. In advertising his artistic skills among a new set of patrons, Crivelli drew upon his Venetian training and local understanding to cultivate a new pictorial language that was meaningful to the people of Ascoli.

Comparing Crivelli's paintings and luxury crafts is a useful methodology for assessing his work, as it is connected to the ways in which his paintings are experienced, both as composite works of art comprising an assemblage of materials and objects, and as singular objects in their own right. Rather than thinking of Crivelli's paintings as visual 'catalogues' for identifying actual luxury items of the period, as some recent scholars have, I explore his interest in media beyond painting in terms of the values associated with local crafts and specific objects.<sup>5</sup> By narrowing my discussion to the arts of Ascoli, a specific cultural context and its relationship to devotional life emerges, which enriches our understanding of the altarpieces that Crivelli made for his adopted town, as well as his practice as a whole. I begin by addressing the impact of festive life upon the town's craft traditions, and its implications for the ways in which Crivelli's paintings were experienced. I will then explore how Crivelli's practice absorbed the language of goldsmiths' art in technique, material and design. Ascoli was famed for its goldsmithing tradition, whose precious aesthetic and rich materials shaped civic and devotional life in various ways. Textiles were also celebrated, both those imported from other centres and those produced locally. In the final part of the chapter, two case studies elucidate Crivelli's response to fabrics used in religious practice in Ascoli, suggesting ways in which his paintings acquired power through their association with these prestigious objects.

## **Festive life and craft culture**

The concentration and appreciation of crafts in Ascoli Piceno was a defining feature of the town, leading Amico Ricci to suggest that Crivelli made Ascoli his home for this very reason.<sup>6</sup> In Crivelli's lifetime, strong local demand and Ascoli's reputation as an artistic centre

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Moshe Tabibnia, Tiziana Marchesi and Elena Piccoli, eds., *Crivelli e l'arte tessile: I tappeti e i tessuti di Carlo Crivelli* (Milan: Electa, 2010); Benedetta Montevercchi, "La produzione orafa del Quattrocento nei dipinti di Carlo Crivelli," in Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 110-113.

<sup>6</sup> Amico Ricci, *Memorie storiche delle arti e degli artisti della Marca di Ancona*, vol. 1 (Alessandro Mancini: Macerata: 1834), 210.

attracted sculptors, painters, weavers and other craftsmen from across Italy, Croatia and Northern Europe.<sup>7</sup> They found a town where goldsmiths had flourished since at least the fourteenth century.<sup>8</sup> Upon arriving in Ascoli in the early 1470s, we may imagine that Crivelli was taken on a tour of the city's monuments, its artistic treasures and the workshops where its principal crafts were practiced. As a Venetian, and having already received several important commissions from Ascoli's rival town of Fermo, Crivelli must have been treated with a degree of reverence.<sup>9</sup> His absorption of Squarcionism, as well as the artistic language of Venice and Byzantium, evince Crivelli's responsiveness to his artistic environments. Crivelli must have studied the local artistic traditions in Ascoli, both as a form of personal research and to understand its value for his new patrons.

Ascoli's feast days and civic celebrations were occasions to showcase and celebrate the arts.<sup>10</sup> Goldsmiths, uniquely, were permitted to keep their workshops open during such events (although not tell sell their work), allowing visitors to marvel upon their creations and technical innovations.<sup>11</sup> The offering of the "*dudici cirj grossi*" (twelve large candles) during the feast of Saint Emidius was a solemn procession, attended by the entire town, that celebrated the town's twelve main guilds and the patron saint's protection of them.<sup>12</sup> The archives analysed by Giuseppe Fabiani and the Centro Studi sui Giochi Storici, a research group focused on the devotional and civic practice of popular life during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Ascoli, evoke the town's rich multisensory civic and religious festivals. They tell of processions lit up by candles and torches, attended by citizens holding silk banners, playing trumpets and timpani ("*li trombecta, ystriune et naccarini*") and adorned in

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<sup>7</sup> On German and Dalmatian weavers in Ascoli, see Giuseppe Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 2 vols. (Ascoli: Società Tipolitografica editrice, 1950), 1:303-4; on Lombard, Venetian and Tuscan sculptors, *ibid.*, 2:112-128; On painters from Dalmatia and Germany, as well as other Italian regions, active in Ascoli, *ibid.*, 2:142-151, 156-161.

<sup>8</sup> On goldsmithing in Ascoli, see Vincenzo Paoletti, *La scuola di oreficeria ascolana nel quattrocento*, *Ascoli Piceno* (Ascoli: Premiata Tip. Economica, 1908); Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 2:179-212; Giuseppe Clerici, "Scultura e oreficeria del Quattrocento marchigiano: Pietro Vannini," *Storia dell'Arte* 111 (2005): 35-58; Gabriele Barucca and Benedetta Montevicchi, *Atlante dei beni culturali dei territori di Ascoli Piceno e di Fermo. Beni Artistici. Oreficeria*, (Milan: Silvana, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> On the political rivalry between Ascoli and Fermo, see Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1: 99-102, 142-148.

<sup>10</sup> Bernardo Nardi et al., *Ascoli: la festa e la Quintana: vestirsi nella società marchigiana del Quattrocento* (Ascoli Piceno: Grafiche Cesari Ascoli Piceno, 1990); Bernardo Nardi and Stefano Papetti, eds., *Segni, simboli, spazi e colori della festa mondana medievale. V Convegno di studi, Ascoli Piceno, 4-5 Maggio, 1996* (Ascoli Piceno: Tipografia Tacconi, 1996); Papetti and Nardi, *Ascoli ai tempi dell'antica Quintana*.

<sup>11</sup> Grelli, "Festa, giostra e moda," 66-7.

<sup>12</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:234-235; Elia Calilli Nardinocchi, "La città, la società e le arti dell'abbigliamento nel '400 ascolano," in Nardi, *Ascoli: la festa*, 22.

extravagant costumes;<sup>13</sup> architecture decorated with real festoons of fruit, flowers and vegetation; painted ephemeral architecture; as well as spectacles such as jousting and performances of episodes from the Passion known as *sacre rappresentazioni*.<sup>14</sup>

As Edward Muir and others have shown, the rituals of civic and devotional life were a central aspect of every town and city across Europe during the early modern period, encouraging social cohesion through collective participation in rites that gave the sacred a presence on earth, and the toils of everyday life a higher meaning.<sup>15</sup> However, the frequency of feast days and the zeal with which they were celebrated was especially intense in the Marche. Flavio Biondo's characterization of the region, written roughly twenty years before Crivelli's arrival in c. 1450, evokes the deeply spiritual, often suspicious, nature of its people and the treacherous domain they inhabited.<sup>16</sup> Biondo found it "truly difficult to describe this kind of mountainous terrain, and the places located within it, because it is so full of woods, divided by streams and high cliffs, that there is no map or verbal description which can give a complete account of them."<sup>17</sup> Within such a terrain, heretical sects such as the '*Fratricelli*', a group of spiritual Franciscans who elected their own Popes, and who, according to Biondo, lived decadent lives, engaging in illicit sexual activity, could thrive.<sup>18</sup> The ardent Observant Franciscan preachers and followers of Bernardino of Siena (1380-1444), Giovanni da Capestrano (1386-1456) and Giacomo della Marca (1391-1476), whom Crivelli painted in numerous altarpieces, were charged by Pope Nicholas V to persecute them.<sup>19</sup> The Marche was a Franciscan stronghold, and the friars were Crivelli's principal patrons, commissioning works from him and his brother, Vittore, that helped to spread their ideologies and encourage cults around their most revered recently deceased adherents.<sup>20</sup> The activities of the religious orders was fundamental at a time of deep political uncertainty. Following the

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<sup>13</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:238.

<sup>14</sup> Laura Ciotti, "Segni e simboli dei cortei civici ad Ascoli attraverso le fonti documentarie," in Nardi and Papetti, *Segni*, 21-31; Stefano Papetti, "La città in festa: decorazioni ed apparati urbani fra medioevo e rinascimento," in Nardi and Papetti, *Segni*, 45-49.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1-11.

<sup>16</sup> Flavio Biondo, *Italia Illustrata*, trans. Catherine J. Castner, vol. 2 (New York: Global Academic Publishing, 2010), 175-203.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-189.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 201; Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 53-65.

<sup>20</sup> Gioia Mori, "'Quarta fuit sanguinis a deitate': la disputa di S. Giacomo della Marca nel Polittico di Massa Fermana di Carlo Crivelli," *Storia dell'arte* 47 (1983): 17-27; Marina Massa, "Vittore Crivelli e la committenza marchigiana," in *Vittore Crivelli e la pittura del suo tempo nel Fermano*, ed. Stefano Papetti (Milan: Federico Motta Editore: 1997), 45-53; Silvano Bracci, ed., *Il culto e l'immagine. San Giacomo della Marca (1393-1476) nell'iconografia marchigiana* (Milan: Federico Motta Editore, 1998); Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 168, 227-247, 359-377, 489-500; Giuseppe Capriotti, "Ce sta picto. Simboli e figure nella pittura di Vittore Crivelli e del suo tempo" in Coltrinari and Delpiori, *Vittore Crivelli*, 73-85; Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 57-65, 93-103, 145-146.

fall of Constantinople in 1453, and due to the region's vulnerability on the Adriatic coast, the threat of Turkish invasion was a constant concern, evoked by the encroaching turbaned figures that often populate the distant landscapes of Crivelli's paintings and those of many other artists active in eastern Italy. Giovanni da Capestrano and Giacomo della Marca engaged in preaching campaigns throughout the Marche's many towns and *castelli* to raise contributions towards the crusades organised by the Popes.<sup>21</sup> But they also helped to pacify domestic factions that unfolded within the region's towns — between the '*Anziani*', elected magistrates, and the '*Podestà*', the jurisdiction made up of 'foreign' officials, as occurred in Ascoli in 1470,<sup>22</sup> as well as bloody disputes caused by party enmity between the Guelfs, who supported the Papacy, and the Ghibellines, who supported the Emperor.<sup>23</sup> Life for the Marchigian people in Crivelli's day was made yet harder by earthquakes, plagues and famines, all of which were believed to be signs of God's wrath against man's sins.<sup>24</sup>

In the midst of these hardships, it was ever more important to invoke the protection of the Virgin and the saints. This manifested itself specifically in the commissioning, making, offering and parading of images and objects. No place better exemplifies how special materials could offer evidence of divine intervention than the Basilica della Santa Casa at Loreto, 40 miles north of Ascoli, where, according to Biondo, proof that the "prayers of supplicants are answered by God through the intercession of his mother" was in "thank-offerings of gold, silver, wax, cloth, garments of linen and wool."<sup>25</sup> Participation in devotional rituals approved by the church helped citizens to feel part of a community, and kept the temptation to join dissident groups at bay. Most importantly, such rituals offered a joyful antidote to the struggles of everyday existence. According to Fabiani, Ascoli observed about eighty annual religious holidays dedicated to the Madonna, the apostles, the evangelists, important martyrs and female saints, many of whom the local community would have seen represented in Crivelli's altarpieces.<sup>26</sup> Together with the feasts of the Annunciation, Augustine, Dominic and the Holy Thorn (*Sacra Spina*), the most important was that of the town's patron saint, Emidius, the first bishop of Ascoli and a Christian martyr at the time of Pope Marcellus I (308-309).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 47-8.

<sup>22</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:158-9.

<sup>23</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 24-26.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

<sup>25</sup> Biondo, *Italia Illustrata*, 2:193.

<sup>26</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:229.

<sup>27</sup> Furio Cappelli, "L'ambiente del rito emidiano: Aspetti e significati della cattedrale di Ascoli," in Nardi and Papetti, *Segni*, 157-170.

Crivelli's *Annunciation with Saint Emidius* (**fig. 2**), his most famous painting, offers a metaphor for how the faithful may have experienced a transfigured reality during religious festivals. The scene unfolds upon the feast day of the Annunciation, the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, the day upon which Ascoli, in 1482, received the bull informing them that *Libertas Ecclesiastica* had been granted, enabling a degree of administrative independence from the papal state, albeit in exchange for a heavy tax.<sup>28</sup> Crivelli depicts a celestial Ascoli transformed by material splendour. As well as the oriental rugs hanging from the windows — one of the many ways that citizens adorned their town on feast days —<sup>29</sup> the restrained, pale-grey travertine stone of the town's actual architecture is replaced by *all'antica* ornamental friezes and slabs of variegated marble, splintered with gold. This break with the everyday environment is accompanied by the arrival of the Holy Spirit in a shower of gold leaf (neatly penetrating a frieze to enter Mary's house) and of the Archangel Gabriel and Saint Emidius, the latter holding a model of the town (with its actual grey travertine stone walls).<sup>30</sup> Precious materials and their exquisite facture are presented as a signal of sacred presence in this work.

Although the ephemeral materials used for festival decorations have not survived, we may imagine that the temporary structures that were erected and painted, as well as the vegetable festoons, banners and lanterns that adorned these structures and the city's buildings, must have created an array of colour and texture, eliciting heightened sensory responses.<sup>31</sup> During processions, these decorations were accompanied by the actual presence of the saint, in the form of their bodily relics. One of the most important aspects of the festival of Saint Emidius, was (and is) a procession during which the saint's arm reliquary (**fig. 18**), a work by the town's most celebrated goldsmith, Pietro Vannini (1413/14-95/96), was carried through the streets. While in Crivelli's painted fiction, the appearance of a reincarnate Emidius is possible, during the festival, communities could experience the bodily presence of Emidius on their streets through the reliquary. The decorations, then, had several functions: to honour the saint who has being celebrated, as well as God; to promote civic pride and social cohesion; and to create a break with the norm, exciting feelings of devotion in the faithful that enabled them to experience sacred presence. For Crivelli's

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<sup>28</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:117-124.

<sup>29</sup> Catarina Schmidt Arcangeli, "Fra rito e potere. Il tappeto nella pittura veneziana del XV secolo," in Tabibnia, Marchesi and Piccoli, *Crivelli e l'arte tessile*, 97-102.

<sup>30</sup> On the role of gold in this painting, see Alison Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 58-9; Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 88-9.

<sup>31</sup> Papetti, "La città in festa," 45-49; Leopardi, "'Ornamentis Secundum Condecetiam Sui Status,'" 266.

audience, familiar with the material signifiers of sanctity during rituals such as the Feast of Saint Emidius, his ornamental vocabulary would have held associations with these events.<sup>32</sup>

Stefano Papetti and Liliana Leopardi have explored the relationship between festive life in Ascoli and the garlands and fashionable clothing worn by saints in Crivelli's paintings, both of which would have been familiar to the viewer from their participation in civic celebrations.<sup>33</sup> Leopardi thus argues that the prominence of vegetation in Crivelli's paintings does not indicate the slavish repetition of a motif learnt in Padua, where its currency hinged upon its association with antique sculpture, but demonstrates his recognition of festive ornament as an appropriate way to honour the sacred for his new audiences.<sup>34</sup> This idea is supported by Thomas Golsenne's observation that the cucumber, or gourd, appears for the first time in the altarpiece for Ascoli's cathedral,<sup>35</sup> and that fruit and vegetation more generally becomes increasingly prominent in Crivelli's paintings with the passing of time.<sup>36</sup> I would further propose that the increasing insistence upon the depiction and evocation of luxury crafts in Crivelli's work can be understood in light of Ascoli's artisanal culture: its renowned goldsmithing tradition, the concentration of crafts and their cross-pollination, necessitated by festival preparations, as well as the particular materials and skills that such spectacles celebrated.

## Crivelli and goldsmithing

Following the example of Gentile da Fabriano (c. 1370-1427), the Marche's most talented painters received creative stimulation and patronage in the Veneto.<sup>37</sup> Before Crivelli, his workshop and followers, there was no established tradition of altarpiece-painting in Ascoli.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Leopardi, "'Ornamentis Secundum Condecentiam Sui Status,'" 266-8.

<sup>33</sup> Stefano Papetti, "Un secolo di tessuti attraverso le testimonianze pittoriche," in Nardi et al., *Ascoli: la festa*, 75-90; Papetti, "La Città in Festa," 46; Leopardi, "'Ornamentis Secundum Condecentiam Sui Status,'" 256.

<sup>34</sup> Leopardi, "'Ornamentis Secundum Condecentiam Sui Status,'" 266.

<sup>35</sup> Golsenne, "Carlo Crivelli: Portrait of the Artist as a Cucumber," 86; Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 157.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-6.

<sup>37</sup> Giuseppe Fiocco, "I pittori marchigiani a Padova nella prima metà del Quattrocento," *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* 91, no. 2 (1931/2): 1359-1370; Matteo Mazzalupi, "Novità sui viaggi dei pittori camerinesi tra Padova e Roma," *Nuovi studi. Rivista di arte antica e moderna* 19, no. 20 (2014): 5-18.

<sup>38</sup> Alessandro Marchi, "Pittura medioevale nell'Ascolano e nel Fermano," in *Beni artistici: pittura e scultura. Atlante dei beni culturali dei territori di Ascoli Piceno e di Fermo*, ed. Stefano Papetti (Milan: Silvana Editore, 2003), 13-33; on the situation in the Marche generally, see Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 77-78.

Altarpieces were ordered from Venice, or executed by itinerant painters. And almost all examples were to be found in a single church: San Domenico.

Elia Nardinocchi has described goldsmithing as the most prominent and advanced craft in Ascoli during Crivelli's day, and the art form that best represented the town's values.<sup>39</sup> Goldsmiths populated Ascoli's central street, the Via del Trivio, known as the "*strata aurificum*," "goldsmiths' street," with their workshops.<sup>40</sup> Vannini's work played a major role in shaping and promoting the civic identity of Ascoli, both through his majestic statue of Saint Emidius (**fig. 19**, commissioned along with Crivelli's *Annunciation* to celebrate *Libertas Ecclesiastica*), and the arm reliquary containing relics of the patron saint, which played the most important role of any devotional object during the feast of Saint Emidius (**fig. 18**). Vannini's secular production, none of which has survived (but would have included luxury belts, buttons, and jewellery), adorned the aristocracy and as such helped to define different strata of society.<sup>41</sup> Precious metalwork, and its potential to influence society, led Giacomo della Marca to regard it with some suspicion. Leopardi has shown how the Franciscan preacher, who helped to write Ascoli's sumptuary laws, saw precious materials as morally questionable, listing them in descending order of value, from most offensive to least offensive: gems, precious stones, semiprecious stones, gold and silver.<sup>42</sup> However, as Leopardi notes, the use of precious materials for ecclesiastical vestments was seen as befitting of the honour due to members of the clergy. This distinction is helpful in considering how rich ornamentation was seen as appropriate in Crivelli's paintings for clerical contexts.<sup>43</sup>

Crivelli's paintings demonstrate that he was acutely aware of the prestige of goldsmiths' art, yet few art historians have explored the connections with Ascoli's craft traditions.<sup>44</sup> Although his paintings are evidence alone of this, notary records and contracts confirm Crivelli's association with goldsmiths. Francesco di Paolino called Coticchia, a goldsmith from the Offida province of Ascoli whose signature appears alongside Vannini's on the statue of *Saint Emidius* (**fig. 19**), was listed in 1478 as a witness when Crivelli bought a

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<sup>39</sup> Nardinocchi, "La città, la società e le arti," 31.

<sup>40</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 2:202.

<sup>41</sup> Payments for belts, buttons and jewelry are recorded in contemporary archival documents. See n. 51, below.

<sup>42</sup> Leopardi, "'Ornamentis Secundum Condecentiam Sui Status'," 259.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 266-8.

<sup>44</sup> Leopardi has noted that connections between painters and goldsmiths in the region is "long overdue." Liliana Leopardi, "Review of Exhibition, Ornament and Illusion: Carlo Crivelli of Venice (Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 25 October 2015 – 25 January 2016)," *Renaissance Studies* 31, no. 4 (2016): 653.

house in the San Biagio *sestiere* of Ascoli.<sup>45</sup> Another goldsmith, Mariano di Venanzio Meneconi from Camerino, who also worked alongside Vannini,<sup>46</sup> appears in the final payment for the triptych Crivelli painted for the church of San Domenico in Camerino, signed and dated 1482 (**fig. 20**).<sup>47</sup> In 1488, Meneconi's name appears again in the acts relating to Crivelli's *Christ giving the Keys to Saint Peter* (1483-8; **fig. 21**), painted for the church of San Pietro di Muralto in Camerino.<sup>48</sup> It is difficult to say precisely what Crivelli's relationship with these goldsmiths was, but certainly it involved a professional element, as Meneconi's name was listed in a payment for one of Crivelli's altarpieces. Daffra has suggested that a goldsmith, who would have been more practiced than a painter at using iron tools to make decorative indentations in metal, was responsible for the tooling of Crivelli's gold grounds with pomegranate patterns, which appear for the first time in his altarpiece for the Dominicans of Fermo.<sup>49</sup> She even suggests that Meneconi was paid for tooling the gold ground of the altarpiece for San Domenico in Camerino. Although this is possible, particularly as Crivelli must have subcontracted aspects of his production to other specialized craftsmen when working on large commissions, tooling was of course part of every painter's skill set, and there are no other known instances of goldsmiths tooling gold grounds on behalf of painters.

It is likely that Crivelli borrowed props from goldsmiths and jewellers. The wealth of metal accessories adorning the figures in Crivelli's paintings — croziers, morses and crowns, tiaras, necklaces and belts, intricately wrought clasps on bodices, all heightened in gold, embellished with gems, or raised in *pastiglia* — are executed with a level of detail to suggest that they were copied from life, as Benedetta Montecvecchi has suggested.<sup>50</sup> Fifteenth-century inventories and payments listing gilt silver and enamelled belts, silver buttons, rings and strings of pearls offer a sense of the kinds of secular objects that goldsmiths and jewellers were producing.<sup>51</sup> Surviving sacred metalwork, such as the votive crown that probably once adorned a wooden polychrome sculpture of the Virgin in the collegiate church of Offida, Ascoli Piceno (**fig. 22**), provides a clear idea of what Crivelli may have had access

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<sup>45</sup> Coltrinari, "Regesto documentario," 194, doc. 83.

<sup>46</sup> Matteo Mazzalupi, "Mercanti, nobili, sacerdoti, notai: appunti d'archivio sui committenti di Carlo Crivelli a Camerino," in Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 79.

<sup>47</sup> Coltrinari, "Regesto documentario," 195, doc. 102.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 197, doc. 125.

<sup>49</sup> Daffra, "Incantesimi degli occhi," in Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 21; Giuseppe Clerici also notes that Crivelli's tooled grounds increase in quality and frequency upon his arrival in Ascoli, when he would have come into contact with Pietro Vannini Clerici, *Pietro Vannini: scultore orafa del Quattrocento* (Ascoli Piceno: Capponi Editore, 2010), 124.

<sup>50</sup> Montecvecchi, "La produzione orafa," 111.

<sup>51</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 2: app. cvii, docs. 57-8; app. xviii, docs. 1, 4.

to.<sup>52</sup> In his altarpieces, Crivelli cites goldsmith's art in multiple ways. As well as depicting examples of metalwork, Crivelli reproduced the materials and techniques of such objects in his altarpieces. If painted and gilded representations of precious metalwork were common enough in paintings of the period, particularly when representing bishop or aristocratic saints, the ways in which Crivelli's paintings strive to 'become' works of precious metalwork, particularly during the late fifteenth century, is more unusual. The emergence of new techniques and designs in Crivelli's work for Ascoli indicates that he was highly engaged with the activities of goldsmiths' workshops on the *strata aurificum*, as well as with the work of earlier practitioners, such as Lorenzo d'Ascoli (active 1414).<sup>53</sup>

While Crivelli's works before his arrival in Ascoli represent painted gems, he attached actual glass gems and perhaps precious stones for the first time to the panels of the cathedral polyptych. These are all now lost, but the sheer number of small crevices over the panels, most concentrated on Saint Emidius's vestments (**fig. 23**), reveals that the altarpiece once had over one hundred 'gems',<sup>54</sup> which must have produced a dazzling effect similar to the *Pala d'Oro* in San Marco, Venice (**fig. 6**).<sup>55</sup> While the idea of gems attached to flat figures comes from Venice's Byzantine and Gothic heritage, their appearance for the first time in Crivelli's work for Ascoli suggests that they had a particular currency in the city.

The question as to what kind of 'gems' were there originally is a difficult but important one. Four of Crivelli's altarpieces had gems embedded in their surface, none of which were for his Franciscan patrons, from whom he received the most commissions. All of these are polyptychs: one for Ascoli's Cathedral (1473; **fig. 14**), two for San Domenico (1476, c.1479; **figs. 24, 25**) and the triptych for San Domenico in Camerino (1482; **fig. 24**). Of these, only one gem appears to be original: the cabochon topaz on the clasp of the Virgin's mantle for the Camerino altarpiece, now in the Brera (**fig. 26**).<sup>56</sup>

The thriving tradition of goldsmithing in Crivelli's day means that he would have had easy access to precious stones in workshops along the Via del Trivio, although goldsmiths will also have used glass gems as cheaper alternatives.<sup>57</sup> Although there are no other recorded

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<sup>52</sup> Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, cat. 24.

<sup>53</sup> For Lorenzo d'Ascoli, see Gabriele Barucca, "Lorenzo d'Ascoli e Antonio da Sant'Elpidio, Maestri Orafi del Primo Quattrocento," in Barucca and Montevecchi, *Beni Artistici: Oreficeria*, 89-105.

<sup>54</sup> Saint Emidius's papal crown has approximately 52 crevices, and his morse approximately 30. There are many more on his orphrey, the Virgin's crown and St Catherine's tiara.

<sup>55</sup> See Introduction, 11.

<sup>56</sup> Sara Scatragli, "Il polittico di Carlo Crivelli per San Domenico: Osservazioni tecniche sulla doratura," in *Da Varano e le arti*, eds. Andrea De Marchi and Pier Luigi Falaschi, vol. 1 (Camerino: Acquaviva Picena, 2003), 481.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Vannini's processional crucifix in the Musée national du Moyen-Age – Cluny, Paris in Barucca and Montevecchi, *Beni Artistici: Oreficeria*, 113, fig. 9.

instances of painters using precious stones for their paintings (where known, they are identified as glass, and this is backed up by documentary evidence),<sup>58</sup> it is possible that the gems Crivelli used on the cathedral polyptych, and perhaps also the altarpieces for San Domenico in both Ascoli and Camerino, were precious stones, similar to the cabochon topaz on the Brera panel. That all of the gems from the cathedral altarpiece are missing may be significant. It is unlikely that they were lost in transit, which is possible for the other altarpieces, as these were dismantled and sold in the eighteenth century. Moreover, bearing in mind Crivelli's rigorous technique, which means that many of his works are still in excellent condition, with relief elements intact (for example, Saint Peter's keys on the altarpieces for San Domenico in Ascoli and Camerino, **figs. 27, 28**), the gems may have been removed manually. At some point between 1796 and 1798, the pearls once attached to the cope given to Ascoli by Pope Niccolò IV in 1288, a precious work of *opus anglicanum*, were sold by the cathedral canons, either as a contribution to the funds necessary to pacify the French, or to pay for the construction of the Cappella del Sacramento in the cathedral, where Crivelli's altarpiece is now housed.<sup>59</sup> Their sale, however, is not included in the list of treasures given by the cathedral as part of the funds paid to the French,<sup>60</sup> so the latter possibility is more likely, although it is telling that included in the list is a necklace from the "*Madonna di San Luca*" (**fig. 29**; Pietro Alemanno's replacement painting after the original was burnt in a fire).

This confirms both that images could be adorned with valuable stones, and that the canons saw them as fit to remove for sale. Although it cannot be proven, it is possible that the gems on Crivelli's altarpiece were removed for sale, either to fund building work or the purchase of something at the cathedral, or perhaps as part of the booty that would satisfy the Treaty of Tolentino. If this is the case, the implication is that they would have been of some value, and therefore not made of glass. Crivelli's use of gems, whether glass or precious, inserted his work into a category of objects that also comprised gems, whether reliquaries, jewellery or textile vestments. His close observation of such examples is suggested by the fact that the surviving topaz is set within a clasp, which would be necessary on an actual piece of jewellery, whereas most other examples of gems in Italian painting are set directly in gesso, as recommended by Cennino.<sup>61</sup> Equally, this may simply imply that

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<sup>58</sup> See Ch. Three, 125-6.

<sup>59</sup> Giuseppe Fabiani, "Il dominio francese in Ascoli nel 1798-99. Il Card. Archetti e il Capomassa Sciabolone," in "Il risorgimento italiano e le Marche," special issue, *Studio Picena* 29 (1961): 9-10, f. 28.

<sup>60</sup> Cesare Mariotti, "Oggetti sacri d'argento esulati da Ascoli nel 1796," *Rassegna bibliografica dell'arte italiana* 3 (1900): 140.

<sup>61</sup> See Ch. Three, 125-6.

Crivelli's gems were sourced from jewellers who were using the same type for their own productions.<sup>62</sup>

This specificity of detail is also seen in Crivelli's depictions of other goldsmiths' work. Unlike the spindly crozier held by Saint Sylvester in the Massa Fermana altarpiece (**fig. 7**), the robust, ornate and three-dimensional one held by Saint Emidius in the Ascoli Cathedral altarpiece could well have been based on a real object (**fig. 30**). Ascoli was famed for its production of gold and silver belts ornamented with rubies and enamelwork — "*zone sive corrigie de argento cum frasio rubeo*," and "*centurie de argento smaltato aurato cum frasio viridi*," — as described often in payments from wealthy clients.<sup>63</sup> A comparison between the way in which Crivelli depicts belts, small, simple and generic, before his arrival in Ascoli, with those afterwards, tells us that he was quite clearly drawing on this local artisanal source. Dating to the same years as the Ascoli Polyptych, and therefore likely painted in Crivelli's workshop in Ascoli, the *Saint Sebastian* in the the *Second Valle Castellana Triptych*, made for the parish church of San Vito, about 14 kilometers south of Ascoli, wears a large and magnificent belt with red silk embroidered with gold thread and a large, gilt buckle (**fig. 31**). The next time such splendid belts appear is in Crivelli's altarpieces for San Domenico, worn by Saints Catherine and Lucy (**figs. 32, 33**). These belts would have surpassed the 10 florins worth of "*centora de oro...overo argento*," "belts of gold or silver," that women of the day were allowed to wear,<sup>64</sup> and their costliness would have signified both the sacred, impossible realm of the altarpiece, and the holy status of the figures wearing them.

Whether executed by a member of the workshop, Crivelli himself, or indeed a goldsmith, the magnificent tooled gold grounds with pomegranate patterns, which feature in all four Dominican polyptychs, and the polyptych for Ascoli's cathedral, are strongly intermedial in character (intermediality being the mingling of different media in single objects). As is well known, the altarpiece as a form grew out of the metal antependium, and was, from the beginning, an imitative work whose humble materials made it a much cheaper alternative.<sup>65</sup> The sense that gold grounds were meant to resemble solid gold is evoked by Cennino Cennini's instructions to painters to burnish gold leaf until it is "almost dark, it is so shiny."<sup>66</sup> As painting progressed, however, gold grounds increasingly became associated with

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<sup>62</sup> As suggested by Scatragli, "Il polittico di Carlo Crivelli," 481.

<sup>63</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 2:291, app. xvii, doc. 57; 2:294, app. xviii, doc. 1.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:189.

<sup>65</sup> Andrea De Marchi, *La pala d'altare: Dal paliotto al polittico gotico* (Florence: Art & Libri, 2009); Alexander Nagel, "Altarpiece (Definition and History)," in *The Dictionary of Art*, ed. Jane Turner, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1996), 707-13.

<sup>66</sup> Cennini, *Il Libro Dell'Arte*, 173, Ch. 138; Paul Hills, *The Light of Early Italian Painting* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), 11.

a gold field, or *'campo d'oro'*, a metaphor for the infinite divine.<sup>67</sup> We know that Crivelli was sensitive to the theological possibilities of gold from his use of the material in both the *Crucifixion* (**fig. 13**) and *The Annunciation* (**fig. 2**).<sup>68</sup>

In contrast, I would argue that Crivelli's tooled grounds deliberately limit this idea, restoring a sense of the worldly and bringing his altarpieces back to their original function as alternatives to luxury craft objects. For tooling immediately denies the possibility of depth and brings the viewer's attention to the flat surface of the panel. While the brocade design associates the gold ground with textiles, as Alison Wright has noted, the technique simulates the surfaces of metalwork sculpture.<sup>69</sup> Incised foliate designs made with a stylus, which are textured using small punches with circular endings, creating a contrast between smooth, reflective metal and opaque granulation, are features both of Crivelli's paintings and goldsmiths' work, seen, for example, in Lorenzo d'Ascoli's processional crucifixes (**fig. 34**). Had Crivelli wished to simulate cloth, he may have incised vertical parallel lines instead of punchwork to suggest an effect of boucle metal wefts, such as the many examples of pressed brocade in Northern art of the period,<sup>70</sup> and the cloth-of-honour incised by a modern hand on the gold ground of the Philadelphia Museum of Art *Pietà*.<sup>71</sup> The Virgin against the cloth-of-honour refers to a specifically pictorial tradition, but sacred figures on top of metal recall, once again, antependia such as the *Pala d'Oro*, or Byzantine icons, with their coloured enamel figures set against solid gold (**fig. 6**). This aesthetic and material connection may in part explain why Crivelli's paintings have been described on numerous occasions as appearing like enamels.<sup>72</sup> It is also worth bearing in mind that the cathedral altarpiece is believed to have been displayed above an impressive mid fourteenth-century silver antependium depicting twenty-seven scenes from the life of Christ in low relief (**fig. 35**). Both altarpiece and antependium correspond in width, and it is thought that the latter

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<sup>67</sup> On the gold field and Crivelli, See Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 86-9.

<sup>68</sup> See Introduction, 30; Ch. Five, 162-3. Emanuela Daffra, "Incantesimi per gli occhi," 209-10; Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 57-7; Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 87-8.

<sup>69</sup> Alison Wright describes the tooled grounds of the altarpieces for San Domenico as "cloths-of-honour." Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 64.

<sup>70</sup> Ingrid Geelen and Delphine Steyaert, *Imitation and Illusion: Applied Brocade in the Art of the Low Countries in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Brussels: Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage 2011).

<sup>71</sup> Francesco De Carolis, "Panels for the altarpiece for S. Domenico, Fermo, 1472," in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, 173.

<sup>72</sup> Berenson described "the enamel of his surface," while Jenckes spoke of Crivelli's "enamel technique." Berenson, *Venetian paintings, chiefly before Titian, at the Exhibition of Venetian Art* (London: Vacher and Sons, 1895), 11; Jenckes, "Paintings by Carlo Crivelli," 23.

was displayed in front of the high altar during Crivelli's day.<sup>73</sup> As an early and prestigious example of local goldsmiths' art, the antependium may have offered Crivelli a model to match, or even surpass, in terms of its exquisite manipulation of precious metals. The devotee standing before both objects would, moreover, have been able to compare the facture of metalwork and painting, old and new, local and Venetian.

Like the tooled ground, Crivelli's distinctive foliate designs painted in black onto gold leaf had a special currency in Ascoli for their association with goldsmiths' work. The curling, elaborate leaves that ornament numerous items of clothing in Crivelli's paintings have close parallels with those seen on many fifteenth-century processional crucifixes, such as the one by Lorenzo d'Ascoli in Montecassiano (**fig. 34**). The first time that the motif appears is in the smaller altarpiece for San Domenico in Ascoli, in *Saint Michael's* armour and *Saint Lucy's* bodice (**figs. 36, 33**). We then see it in the Magdalene's bodice in the Rijksmuseum panel (c.1472), St Peter's cope in the Brera *San Domenico Triptych* (**fig. 37**), and in the cloth-of-gold in the Boston *Pietà* (1485; **fig. 38**). Each time, the design is modified slightly, but these representations are united by the graphic treatment of the black line with hatching that stands out as somehow not belonging to the medium of painting. The flattening design covers armour, bodices, cloths-of-honour and copes, which in reality would be made of different materials: metal, stiffened velvet, leather and woven or embroidered silk.

Several scholars have noted compositional similarities between these designs and those found in prints by German artists such as the Master E.S. (c.1420–c.1468) and Martin Schongauer (c.1445–1491) (**fig. 39**).<sup>74</sup> It is possible that books containing such prints were available to artists in the Marche, perhaps brought over by one of the many Germans who lived in Ascoli during the fifteenth century.<sup>75</sup> The presence of these patterns in goldsmiths' work and in Crivelli's paintings implies that printed designs were shared and distributed among craftsmen working in different media. They appear to have been especially associated with goldsmiths' work, as well as media that utilised gold leaf.<sup>76</sup> The fact that

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<sup>73</sup> On the antependium, see Benedetta Montevecchi, "Il paliotto d'argento della cattedrale di Ascoli Piceno," *Arte Medioevale* 2 (2003): 177-32; On the hypothesis that it was displayed beneath Crivelli's altarpiece in the fifteenth century, see Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 145.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 253, 271; Valentina Catalucci, "Intreccio di fogliami con un gufo e altri volatile," in Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 161-3; Stephen J. Campbell, "The Dead Christ with the Virgin, St. John, and St. Mary Magdalene, 1485," in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, 192; Luca Geroni noted convincing parallels between Crivelli's compositions and those of the Master E.S., offering evidence that artists in the Marche had access to Northern prints. See Luca Geroni, "Carlo Crivelli e il Monogrammista E.S.," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 40 (1996): 222-231.

<sup>75</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1: 360-363.

<sup>76</sup> Schongauer's designs for metal censers and croziers are embellished with similar foliage. See Pantxika Béguerie, ed., *Le beau Martin: Gravures et dessins de Martin Schongauer (vers 1450-1491)* (Colmar: Musee D'Unterlinden, 1991), exhibition catalogue, 422-425, cats. 155 and 116.

Crivelli's designs are always painted onto gold leaf rather than onto any other colour, suggests that it was metalwork that he intended to simulate, rather than the prints. Crivelli's original audiences would also have made this association, as they were accustomed to seeing goldsmiths' art but not, of course, pattern books kept in artists' workshops.

Crivelli's polyptychs for Ascoli, then, draw on the city's rich goldsmithing tradition as a way of adding cultural value to his work. Golsenne suggests that the cucumber's entrance for the first time in the cathedral altarpiece signals Crivelli's attempt to captivate his new audience's attention with this surprising, incongruous addition, a highly personal mark of authorship.<sup>77</sup> If the cathedral altarpiece, positioned at the most important site of the city, was an opportunity to beguile his new audience, then I would add that the entrance of the cucumber is accompanied by an increased attention towards the *paragone* with goldsmithing, which extends to his work for San Domenico carried out several years later, as well as other paintings executed during the rest of his career. The material complexity and opulence of Crivelli's work is paired with a linear preciousness, whose virtuosity plays on the qualities of goldsmith work.<sup>78</sup> As Davide Gasparotto has shown, in the fifteenth-century the goldsmith was characterised above all as a designer, who could set their mind to architecture, sculpture and painting, an idea encapsulated by figures such as Brunelleschi, Pollaiuolo and Verrocchio.<sup>79</sup> He writes, "by virtue of the complexity of its technical procedures and the intrinsic value of the materials involved, [goldsmithing] was considered at the time to be at the heart of all the arts, enjoying far greater prestige than painting or sculpture."<sup>80</sup> With his inventive, graphic lines, and his ambition for his work to surpass the limits of painting to encompass the qualities of numerous different arts, Crivelli operates as a goldsmith-painter. Paradoxically, those fifteenth-century painters who were trained as goldsmiths — Antonio del Pollaiuolo (1429-98), Andrea del Verrocchio (1435-88), Sandro Botticelli (c.1445-1510) and Francesco Francia (c.1447-1517), for example — appear to have been less concerned than Crivelli with posing dialogues between their paintings and metalwork, perhaps because the cities in which they operated were centres of excellence in painting.

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<sup>77</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 155-157.

<sup>78</sup> As noted by Daffra, *Crivelli a Brera*, 22; Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 199; 224.

<sup>79</sup> Davide Gasparotto, "The Power of Invention: Goldsmiths and *Disegno* in the Renaissance," in *Donatello, Michelangelo, Cellini. Sculptors' Drawings from Renaissance Italy*, ed. Michael C. Cole (London: Paul Holberton, 2014), exhibition catalogue, Istabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 41-55. See also Ch. Six, 185.

<sup>80</sup> Gasparotto, "The Power of Invention," 41.

## Embroidery into painting

As major producers of woollen cloth and cotton yarn, and importers of silks from Venice, Tuscany and the Levant, the people of Ascoli placed a deep importance on the making, trading and display of textiles in everyday life.<sup>81</sup> The representation of brocaded silks and oriental rugs in Crivelli's work is a rich subject that has already been studied in some detail, although often as a way of shedding light on the textiles, rather than the paintings.<sup>82</sup> However, the small group of extant textiles made and used for religious purposes that were present in Ascoli during Crivelli's day, including the aforementioned cope, an important work of *opus anglicanum* woven with pearls, have been ignored by Crivelli scholars.<sup>83</sup> The cope is familiar to historians of medieval embroidery,<sup>84</sup> but the recently discovered oriental cloths (**figs. 40, 41**), veils and the newly restored embroidered orphrey panels attached to an altar frontal (**fig. 42**), have as yet only been studied by local historians.<sup>85</sup> In the following section, I consider how the oriental cloths and orphrey interact with Crivelli's altarpiece for Ascoli's cathedral. United by their location in the cathedral and shared iconography, these objects differed in function and the degree to which they were visible, making the relationship between them more than just aesthetic.

Painted depictions of orphreys present various visual, technical and ideological issues.<sup>86</sup> An orphrey is an embroidered panel made of cloth-of-gold or silk depicting figures, buildings or ornament. It was normally designed by a painter and executed by a group of embroiderers.<sup>87</sup> It would then be sewn onto liturgical vestments that were designed by

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<sup>81</sup> Emanuela Di Stefano, "Tappeti e tessuti nel commercio intercontinentale. Il ruolo delle Marche fra XIV e XVI secolo," in Tabibnia, Marchesi and Piccoli, *Crivelli e l'arte tessile*, 60-65; Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:300-311.

<sup>82</sup> Tabibnia, Marchesi and Piccoli, *Crivelli e l'arte tessile*. The exception is Lisa Monnas, *Merchants, Princes, Painters*, 168-72, 219-22. Monnas explores Crivelli's techniques for depicting textiles; how the repetition of designs indicates certain workshop practices; and the symbolism of Crivelli's pomegranate and bird designs.

<sup>83</sup> For catalogue entries on these works, see Michele Picciolo, ed., *Le arti ad Ascoli al tempo di Crivelli. Il mecenatismo di un cescovo umanista: Prospero Caffarelli* (Ascoli Piceno: Tipografica Tacconi, 2010).

<sup>84</sup> Rosalia Bonito Fanelli, ed., *Il piviale duecentesco di Ascoli Piceno* (Florence: Cantini Editore, 1990); Michael A. Michael, ed., *The Age of Opus Anglicanum* (London and Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016), 23-24.

<sup>85</sup> Benedetta Montevecchi, "I tessili antichi della Cattedrale di Ascoli Piceno," *Studia Picena* 74 (2009): 7-19; Furio Cappelli, "La leggenda del re cacciatore," *Medioevo* 176 (2011): 56-65.

<sup>86</sup> For a rich discussion of the relationship between orphreys, architecture and painting, see Barbara M. Eggert, "Edification with Threads and Needle: On the Uses and Functions of Architectural Elements on Medieval Liturgical Vestments and their Representation in Contemporary Paintings of the Mass of St. Gregory (13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> c.)," in *Clothing the Sacred. Medieval Textiles as Fabric, Form and Metaphor*, Mateusz Kapustka and Warren T. Woodfin, eds., *Textile Studies* 8 (Berlin: Edition Imorde, 2015), 53-69.

<sup>87</sup> Payments for textiles suggest that nuns were largely responsible for weaving in Ascoli. Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1: 188, n. 16.

different artists and produced by separate workshops.<sup>88</sup> Apparels are larger, single panels attached to a dalmatic, amice or alb, while orphreys are a series of smaller panels joined vertically to form a border for a cope or chasuble.<sup>89</sup> Crivelli depicts both in his work, illustrated by *Saint Peter* now in the Brera (**fig. 37**). By nature of their flat, pictorial designs in colour, orphreys hint at the figurative realism of painting, but their naturalism was limited by adorning clothing that was liable to crease or be temporarily invisible as the person wearing it moved, as well as the tendency for stitch work to flatten form.<sup>90</sup> The physical animation of the orphrey through being worn is often mirrored in the figures depicted upon them, who are active beings that gesture, have facial expressions and exist within their textile microcosm. When these objects are depicted by painters, the contingent qualities of the orphrey are reproduced, as figures are shown to disappear over shoulders or are seen in perspective. Often the figures on painted orphreys, like their embroidered versions, appear animated and just as alive as the full-size figures wearing them. In fact, several painters of the period appear to have been less interested in attempting to recapture the condition of stitched embroidery, and instead treat the figures depicted on orphreys with the same realism as the saints depicted in the painting proper, perhaps even representing a narrative, such as Piero della Francesca's *Saint Augustine*, who wears an orphrey depicting scenes from the life of Christ (**fig. 43**). Orphreys can therefore act as extensions to an altarpiece's iconographic programme, an effect that is especially noticeable when they are shown alongside other small-scale saints in predellas or set within frames, as seen in Giovanni Boccati's altarpiece in the church of Sant'Eustachio in Belforte del Chienti (**fig. 44**), or even the full-size saints in the niches of polyptychs that echo the embroidered niches of the orphrey, evident in Crivelli's altarpiece for Ascoli's cathedral (**fig. 14**).

As a painter, Crivelli may have identified orphreys as belonging to his own creative remit. The role that painters played during the fifteenth century as designers of embroidery, and especially embroidery depicting figures and buildings, is both documented and evident in the objects themselves.<sup>91</sup> As with most aspects of artistic practice in this period, the situation in Florence is especially well recorded, with artists including the Pollaiuolo brothers

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<sup>88</sup> Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters*, 59.

<sup>89</sup> For further explication of the terms for ecclesiastical dress, see Lisa Monnas's glossary: *Merchants, Princes and Painters*, 304.

<sup>90</sup> On the animation of illuminated vestments through being worn, as well as the materiality of embroidered images within the church interior in a Late Byzantine context, see Warren T. Woodfin, *The Embodied Icon: Liturgical Vestments and Sacramental Power in Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 86-93.

<sup>91</sup> Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters*, 41-65.

and Botticelli providing designs to be executed by embroiders.<sup>92</sup> But painters in Crivelli's circle were also involved in textile production. The Paduan Squarcione is recorded as a "sartor et recamator,"<sup>93</sup> while painters from Camerino and Ancona were embroidery designers.<sup>94</sup> Cesare Mariotti's suggestion that the Ascoli orphrey (**fig. 42**) was designed by Crivelli is, therefore, justifiable.<sup>95</sup> However, as Stefano Papetti has pointed out, the designs appear to predate Crivelli's arrival in the Marche in the late 1460s, even if they are apparently of Venetian origin.<sup>96</sup> Turning the issue on its head, Nancy Turner has suggested that Crivelli employed an embroiderer or illuminator to depict his small-scale figures in predella and orphrey panels, noting that their execution often appears looser than the way in which his full size figures are depicted (**fig. 45**).<sup>97</sup> It is likely that Crivelli subcontracted aspects of his work to other artists, and the suggestion that these artists were specialists in other media is plausible. However, this theory does not take into account that small-scale figures demanded a different technique. As well as necessitating livelier brushwork in order to be read coherently from a distance, what appears to be a looser execution is inevitable, considering that the same size brush appears to have been used for the full-scale figures, rendering the same level of detail impossible. Moreover, if an illuminator were responsible for painting these small figures, the execution would be tighter, reflecting their intricate practice, not looser.

Due to their detail and the quantity of gold leaf required, the depiction of orphreys can indeed hint at the practicalities of their production. For example, the orphrey worn by Saint Emidius in the cathedral polyptych (**fig. 46**) is far more lavish than the one worn by Saint Peter in the San Domenico polyptych, executed three years later (**fig. 47**). Saint Emidius's orphrey has five visible panels of figures and a further five seen partially; each figure has a *pastiglia* halo and is shown against a gold ground, and their niches were once studded with gems (**fig. 45**); whereas Saint Peter's orphrey only has two visible panels and four partially seen ones, as his cope folds over, showing its green lining, whose execution required less time and no gold leaf; the figures are seen against a green ground with small dots of gold leaf and instead of gems, the niches are studded with imitation pearls and droplets of *pastiglia* (**fig. 48**). The likely explanation for this is the relative funds available for

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<sup>92</sup> Annarosa Garzelli, *Il ricamo nella attività artistica di Pollaiuolo, Botticelli, Bartolomeo di Giovanni* (Florence: Editrice Edam, 1973).

<sup>93</sup> "Tailor and embroiderer." De Nicolò Salmazo, *Francesco Squarcione*, 15.

<sup>94</sup> Claudia Caldari, "Paliotto di San Ciriaco," in Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 180-3.

<sup>95</sup> Cesare Mariotti, *Ascoli Piceno* (Bergamo: Istituto italiano d'arti grafiche, 1928), 70-1.

<sup>96</sup> Stefano Papetti, "Un secolo di tessuti," 83.

<sup>97</sup> Nancy Turner, "Crivelli and Manuscripts" (presentation, study day for the exhibition *Ornament and Illusion: Carlo Crivelli of Venice*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 17 November, 2015).

each commission, with the cathedral canons having more at their disposal than the friars of San Domenico, but there would also have been ideological reasons for both the level of splendour and the choice of saints depicted on the orphreys. The most prominent saint on Peter's orphrey is naturally Paul, while the patrons of the cathedral altarpiece could request that Paul, Peter, Andrew, James and John should all be represented on Emidius's cope. As Lightbown has suggested, this cast Emidius as successor to the Apostles.<sup>98</sup> As Emidius was Ascoli's patron saint, this message was particularly important.

Only one art historian has thus far given Crivelli's orphreys serious (albeit brief) consideration. For Thomas Golsenne, they are "real paintings within a painting," and the cope a kind of "vestment-polyptych."<sup>99</sup> He notes that unlike Crivelli's representations of brocaded cloth, which reproduce the materiality of the prototype, the 'embroidered' figures are painted with vibrant colours and a smooth finish. The sense that the textile figures are conceived as comparable to the full-size saints is suggested by Saint Francis in the orphrey on Saint Sylvester's cope in the Massa Fermana altarpiece, which directly echoes the gesture and the *pastiglia* rays that penetrate the stigmata of the full-length Saint Francis standing to Sylvester's left (**fig. 49**).<sup>100</sup> Crivelli was not the only painter to highlight such parallels. Bartolomeo Vivarini suggested a parity between 'embroidered' and full-length figures in his altarpiece dedicated to Saint Augustine (1473), in which the seated saints on Augustine's orphrey mirror Augustine himself, who is also seated on a throne (**fig. 50**). In the orphrey, the saints sit within a trefoil niche, which reflects the format of the triptych and may hint as to the appearance of the altarpiece's lost frame.

However, Crivelli's addition of relief complicates these issues, as the orphrey is perceived as both a material object and an essay in pictorial illusion. Like a real embroidered orphrey studded with gems, Crivelli's vestments clothing painted bishops thus took on the contingent qualities of a real object, changing as light changed, and moving as the viewer moved. As such, they were not just images, but labile visions, reproducing the effects of reality in the vacuum space of polyptych. However, it is difficult to adequately assess the extent to which Crivelli's orphreys depart from the conditions of embroidered vestments, becoming, in Golsenne's words, "vestment-polyptychs," without comparing them to an actual example.

The fifteenth-century orphrey in the Museo Diocesano of Ascoli Piceno would have been known to both Crivelli and his viewers (**fig. 42**). It has been attached to a silk altar

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<sup>98</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 163.

<sup>99</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 216.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

frontal since the sixteenth century, when it was recomposed to make a decorative to cover for the silver antependium that is displayed underneath Crivelli's polyptych in the cathedral.<sup>101</sup> The smaller central panels each depicting a saint or the Virgin and Child would have been joined vertically to make a single border for a cope or chasuble, while the four larger panels on either side may have been attached to a different garment, such as an alb or dalmatic, as represented in Crivelli's *Saint Peter* for Camerino (**fig. 37**). Each figure is shown standing on a grassy bank with flowers within a niche, the outer border of which is woven with silver and gold thread in varying thicknesses to create relief. The inner niche has thin columns from which leaf-like forms emerge that join into a candelabra motif at the middle. Attention is given to the facial expressions and gestures of the saints, who are shown in full-length with bare feet wearing swathes of drapery and holding their attributes. Adriana Cipollini has suggested that the orphrey was worn by the bishop of Ascoli, Prospero Caffarelli (served 1463-1500), which I think is plausible.<sup>102</sup> Caffarelli would have celebrated mass in front of Crivelli's altarpiece, giving greater immediacy to the painting whilst also visually identifying Caffarelli as Emidius's heir.

I agree with Stefano Papetti that the embroidery designs of the orphrey are not by Crivelli and predate his arrival in the Marche by several decades. They lack the gestural and coloristic variation that characterises Crivelli's figures, and the landscape setting has very little to do with Crivelli. It resembles the flowery bank that Jacobello del Fiore sometimes used. It is Jacobello who Papetti proposes as the potential designer of the Ascoli orphrey, noting that he painted an altarpiece for Teramo, 20 kilometres south of Ascoli, in the 1420s. However, Crivelli's painted orphrey and the embroidered counterpart are united by certain similarities: the figures are set within thick rectangular gold-thread borders with internal niches; attention in both is also given to the facial expressions and gestures of the saints, who are shown in full-length wearing expansive draperies and holding their attributes. There were many options available to painters that did not follow this format, such as Bartolomeo Vivarini's wide niches that accommodate saints each seated on a tri-lobed throne (**fig. 50**). The typology of Crivelli's orphreys is therefore the same as the Ascoli orphrey, which hints at a deliberate choice to link his work with existing craft objects in his adopted town.

There are, however, other examples in Venetian paintings of the first half of the Quattrocento that closely resemble Crivelli's orphreys, which Crivelli would have seen in Venice, such as Antonio Vivarini's *Saint Louis of Toulouse* (**fig. 51**). While maintaining the

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<sup>101</sup> Adriana Cipollini, "Ignoto paolitto," in Picciolo, *Le arti ad Ascoli*, 29.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

shape of the niche, in his orphreys Crivelli added a cord border that he simulated with *pastiglia* or actual rope, giving the orphrey a sense of convincing weight and texture, suitable to the luxurious object that it is (**figs. 45, 48**). The materiality of cord, however, is offset by his animated figures, departing from the more static examples of his Venetian predecessors. Crivelli's palette is also much more vibrant than the earlier examples, and, in the case of the cathedral altarpiece, the addition of actual gems further heightens the dynamism of the 'embroidered' object, which is at once painterly and materially physical. While the orphrey's typology may have been encouraged by knowledge of the Ascoli embroidery, the way of executing it was drawn from the work of his earliest teachers. In any case, if the authorship of the embroidered orphrey is given to Jacobello, or his circle, then Crivelli's source, whether embroidery or painting, is one and the same.

A potential reason why painters like Crivelli and Bartolomeo Vivarini decided not to reproduce the stitchwork of embroidery in their orphreys is that they were asserting their authority over pictorial design, the original intentions of which may have been lost when embroidered. In paint, they restored the dynamic realism that was compromised when translated by needle and thread. The embroidered orphrey may have been costlier, but it could not match the lifelike quality of the painted version. In this sense, it is perhaps not possible to speak of a prototype and a reproduction. If the design belongs to the painter, then perhaps the orphrey's true form was most fully expressed in painting. Certainly, the function of the orphrey to promote its wearer as a successor to the Apostles was more successfully achieved in paint, in which the small-scale figures were stationary and arranged for legibility on the altarpiece. The figures of an embroidered orphrey, which in any case lost definition through the stitchwork, clothed a moving bishop and were less visible.

It is interesting to note that the orphrey painted by Giovanni Bellini in his San Giobbe altarpiece of 1485 meticulously reproduces the stiches of an embroidered textile (**figs. 52, 53**). The outer border has thicker gold thread, and the inner niche surrounding the saint is outlined with fine painted stiches. The figures themselves appear somewhat archaic, and, although stiches are not depicted, they appear almost blurred, which suggests the loss of definition characteristic of the textured, embroidered surface. This may imply a certain distance on Bellini's part from crafts other than painting, although not because he did not provide designs to embroiderers, or work in this medium himself. Rather, Bellini may have recognised a certain ontological separation from the altarpiece as pictorial object and the orphrey as functional item, such that there was no desire to subvert the viewer's expectation of what either is, a theme central to Crivelli's work. Bellini's oil painting is a single-field *sacra*

*conversazione*, in which he simulated the surface textures of other materials without recourse to *pastiglia* or gold leaf. The scene is staged within a receding architectural setting reminiscent of San Marco. Within this convincing space, figures and objects interact almost as they would in reality — one that could not be further away from that of Crivelli's polyptychs for the Cathedral and San Domenico in Ascoli. In them, figures exist in a vacuum within their separate niches; form is deliberately flattened and the painting's own surface plays a role in recreating the surfaces of the objects it depicts. While Bellini's skill lies in transforming inert pigments and oil into embroidery, Crivelli's lies in making embroidering become painting. If Crivelli references an earlier tradition of painting, this does not reflect an inability to keep up with the latest trends. Like Bellini, Crivelli's art demonstrates a deep concern for the transformation of matter by the painter. As with many aspects of his practice, Crivelli's representations of orphreys demonstrate how he used his Venetian sources as a springboard to develop new ideas, which involved his sensitive engagement with devotional objects of prestige in his adopted town, Ascoli.

### Saint Emidius's oriental cloths

The rediscovery in 2006 of oriental cloths protecting the relics of Saint Emidius testifies to the presence of such textiles in the Marche from as early as the eleventh century, as well as their prestige.<sup>103</sup> The emerald green silk samite with hunting scenes woven in yellow thread dates to the end of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century, and is of Syrian origin (**fig. 40**).<sup>104</sup> The linen altar cloth embroidered with bird motifs in red silk and the cotton manuterge to which it is attached date to the tenth or the first half of the eleventh century, and were made in Egypt (**fig. 41**).<sup>105</sup> They arrived in Ascoli by c.1060 when Saint Emidius's relics were transferred from the Campo Parignano cemetery to the cathedral, following the construction of the crypt under Bishop Bernardo (d. after 1069).<sup>106</sup>

Furio Cappelli suggests that the green samite was one of the "*pallia sirica multa et pretiosa*" (precious Syrian cloths) given to Charlemagne as a diplomatic gift by the Caliph of Bagdad in 806.<sup>107</sup> He proposes that Charlemagne could have sent the samites from the Holy Land to the most important monasteries and bishoprics of his empire. Indeed, the eleven

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<sup>103</sup> Montevicchi, "I tessili antichi della Cattedrale di Ascoli Piceno," 7-19.

<sup>104</sup> Cappelli, "La leggenda del re cacciatore," 56-64.

<sup>105</sup> Montevicchi, "I tessili antichi," 12.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>107</sup> Cappelli, "La leggenda del re cacciatore," 59.

extant samites of identical date and geographic origin are now dispersed throughout different cities that were mostly northern-european territories of the Carolingian empire. The Ascoli samite therefore was likely north of the Alps before it arrived in the Marche. Most samites, like the Ascoli cloth, were used to wrap the bodies of saints — owing to their exquisite facture, sacred origins and iconography of resurrection.<sup>108</sup> Martina Bagnoli has shown that woven silk, a precious commodity that until the late Middle Ages came from the Byzantine Empire or Near East, was favoured for this purpose due to its prestigious provenance and precious manufacture. Relics wrapped in such cloths evoked “visions of the soul as it would have appeared in paradise: dressed with the reward of divine bliss.”<sup>109</sup>

Both the Ascoli samite and woven altar cloth utilise a language of immortality, blending religious symbolism originating in the East that was adopted in Western Christianity. Such symbols are a common feature of the Coptic textiles that were requisitioned in Europe for wrapping saintly remains. The samite shows the intrepid Prince Bahram of Persia (reigned 421-39), a legendary huntsman, killing a lion with an arrow (**fig. 54**). The huntsman is depicted in mirror form on either side of a Tree of Life within a roundel that repeats across the cloth.<sup>110</sup> Bahram’s triumph over death is echoed in the multifruiting *lignum vitae* that encloses the scene. The leaves and fruits hanging from the lowest branch are symbols of the resurrection: the grapes, of Christ’s sacrificial blood; the pomegranates, of eternal life; the heart-shaped leaves of evergreen ivy: of the Egyptian God Osiris, who represented immortality. In the spandrels formed by the roundels are Coptic-style crosses surrounded by tendrils that finish in fleur-de-lis, symbols of purity.

The altar cloth woven with red silk has three large birds in octagons which, joined together, form triangular spaces in between them, where symmetrical Trees of Life are attended by mirroring birds (**fig. 41**). Although numerous different species of bird are depicted, the largest are likely to represent the phoenix, which originated in Egyptian mythology and was said to live for 500 years before sacrificing itself upon a flaming pyre, only to be reborn from the ashes.<sup>111</sup> Both textiles incorporate symbols that are common in Paleochristian and Byzantine art: different species of bird interspersed by encircling grape vines are found in numerous sculptural reliefs, mosaics and textiles of late antiquity (**figs. 55, 56**).

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<sup>108</sup> Martina Bagnoli, “Dressing the Relics: Some Thoughts on the Custom of Relic Wrapping in Medieval Christianity,” in *Matter of Faith: An Interdisciplinary Study of Relics and Relic Veneration in the Medieval Period*, eds. James Robinson and Lloyd de Beer (London: The British Museum, 2014), 100-9.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>110</sup> Cappelli, “La leggenda del re cacciatore,” 56.

<sup>111</sup> Montevicchi, “I tessili antichi,” 13.

There is good reason to think that these cloths were known to Bishop Prospero Caffarelli, the cathedral canons and their circle in Ascoli during the second half of the fifteenth century. Caffarelli was a theologian and a humanist, who was responsible for commissioning several significant architectural projects, including restoration of the episcopal palace (1475), additions to the cathedral (1482), and the excavation of antiquities.<sup>112</sup> He placed stone plaques on the facades of the buildings he constructed and renovated, with inscriptions in Latin declaring his patronage and noble lineage from an ancient Roman family.<sup>113</sup> With his interest in antiquity, as well as his position as the successor of Emidius, the first bishop of Ascoli, it seems natural that Caffarelli would have wished to see, and perhaps touch, the patron saint's relics wrapped in oriental cloths, which may have been believed to be contemporary with Emidius's death in the fourth century.

Close visual analysis of Crivelli's textile designs for Emidius's cope and the Virgin's cloth-of-honour in the cathedral altarpiece suggests that Caffarelli may have shown the artist these cloths. Emidius's cope has an emerald green background with symmetrical designs depicted using fine mordant gilding (**figs. 45, 46**). The green is close to the colour of the samite, and the use of gold leaf for the design produces the same effect as the yellow thread with which the design is woven on the samite. For the Virgin's cloth-of-honour with the same design, Crivelli chose red (**fig. 57**). His use of green therefore links the colour of the cope worn by Emidius with the oriental textile wrapping his relics, differentiating him from the Virgin. Four birds of two different species mirror each other, separated by branches tied at the middle that encircle the smaller of the two species. Like the birds on the altar frontal, and the huntsmen on the samite, Crivelli's birds are in profile, and grouped in twos on either side of the tree of life. Crivelli's design mirrors the symmetry of both textiles, which use roundels to frame the scenes, just as the branches frame the birds in Crivelli's design. Foliage grows out of the top of the branches and rays of light burst from a cloud out of the bottom. At either end of the branches are clusters of grapes and heart-shaped leaves of ivy, replicating those that hang from the Tree of Life on the samite.

Lisa Monnas suggested that Crivelli's smaller birds within the encircling branches are pelicans.<sup>114</sup> According to Monnas, the pelican, who allegedly pierced her breast to feed her young with her blood, an analogy for Christ's sacrifice, was often not depicted with a long beak and neck in textiles of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as in Crivelli's design. Monnas identifies Crivelli's other bird, larger with outstretched wings standing on top of the

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<sup>112</sup> Michele Picciolo, "Prospero Caffarelli un vescovo umanista," in Picciolo, *Le arti ad Ascoli*, 12-13.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters*, 221.

branches, as a phoenix. She observes that although phoenixes were often featured in orientalisng textiles, they were described as eagles or falcons in inventories of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although it is hard to pinpoint when the phoenix and its regenerative nature was recognised, Monnas notes that it is clear that Crivelli understood what a phoenix was from the way he depicts it rising from a bed of flames on the sleeve of the Magdalene (an appropriate symbol of her repentance) of the *Montefiore dell'Aso Altarpiece*, contemporary with the Ascoli polyptych (**fig. 58**).<sup>115</sup> Other than its frontality, the bird is identical to the one on the cathedral cloth-of-honour and cope. Crivelli's bird on the cathedral textiles looks up to a shower of light, further confirming its identity, since the phoenix in ancient mythology was also a symbol for the sun. My observations suggest that Crivelli had direct access to oriental cloths depicting phoenixes, and was informed of their significance by an individual that understood their symbolism. It seems plausible that Crivelli's source was the oriental cloths wrapping Emidius's remains, and his informant was Caffarelli.

Elements such as the idiosyncratic heart-shaped leaves on their spindly tendrils, and the hitherto unknown significance of the phoenix, recognised in Crivelli's work, are, I would argue, further evidence of Crivelli's source (**fig. 59**). If this is the case, it has important implications for Crivelli's work. Firstly, it sheds light on the origins of Crivelli's symbolism in Coptic iconography. More broadly, his amalgamation of two different objects to make something new elucidates his creative process. We may imagine that Crivelli, who observed the world of objects carefully, must have designed other aspects of his compositions in a similar way.

These bird designs were not used indiscriminately, however. In fact, they only appear in paintings made for Ascoli. The design on Magdalene's sleeve in the altarpiece for Montefiore dell'Aso (**fig. 58**), one of Ascoli's neighbouring villages, is different from the designs on the Ascoli painting: the phoenix is frontal rather than in profile and stands on flames, without the vegetation and design elements that would link it to the samite. Following the cathedral altarpiece, we find Crivelli's bird designs in the polyptychs for San Domenico: Saint Catherine's dark blue sleeve in the larger altarpiece (1476; **fig. 60**), and the Virgin's *pastiglia* mantle in the smaller altarpiece (c.1479; **fig. 61**). For the latter, Crivelli modified the design slightly by introducing pomegranates alongside the ivy and clusters of grapes, linking his textile with even closer reference to the silk samite, which also depicts tiny

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<sup>115</sup> Lisa Monnas, "The Impact of Oriental Silks on Italian Silk Weaving," in *The Power of Things and the Flow of Cultural Transformations: Art and Culture between Europe and Asia*, eds. Lieselotte E. Saurma-Jeltsch and Anja Eisenbeiss (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2010), 76. 65-89.

pomegranates (**fig. 59**). The next time Crivelli used his design was on the *pastiglia* mantle of the *Virgin and Child* in the Victoria and Albert Museum (c.1480; **fig. 1**), which also includes the pomegranates. Nothing is known of the provenance of the V&A panel, but, for the presence of the bird design with pomegranates in gilt *pastiglia*, I would suggest that it was made for one of Crivelli's patrons in Ascoli at a similar time to the smaller altarpiece for San Domenico, which it resembles stylistically and in the *pastiglia* for the Virgin's mantle. It may even have been commissioned by someone who would have appreciated the reference to Emidius's relics, such as Bishop Caffarelli.

The bird design next appears in a panel of Saint Emidius in the Gallerie dell'Accademia (**fig. 62**). This panel belongs to a polyptych of which the three other extant panels depicting full-length male saints are also in the Accademia. The cloths-of-honour for the other saints have varying pomegranate patterns, whereas Crivelli's bird design for Emidius stands out as being a particular choice. Its use specifically for Emidius here, in a work of the late 1480s, connects the pattern to the saint and to Ascoli specifically. In the Ascoli *Annunciation* of 1486 (**fig. 2**), the design was not used in full but aspects of it appear in a richly significant location: the Virgin's house (**fig. 63**). On the red curtain, beneath the friezes, are suns with rays bursting from them, the same motif that the phoenix looks up to in the complete design. Beneath is the sprig of heart-shaped ivy, which is found again on the green bed cover. These are small details, but it is telling that they are not found in any other work, other than the bird designs on paintings associated with Ascoli. In this work, Emidius wears a cope with pomegranate patterns lined with a border of *all'antica* frieze motifs (**fig. 2**). Although this might seem to weaken the bird design's association with Emidius, the saint's role in the narrative context of the *Annunciation* is different to that of the standing, full-length saint in the polyptych. In the latter, the saint functions as an intercessory figure, where the relationship between the role of the image and the relic is closer. In the late medieval and early modern period, images and relics were not treated as distinct categories, but as extensions of one another.<sup>116</sup> Images and relics were often placed near one another in a church, and were sometimes combined in the same object.<sup>117</sup> An eighteenth-century inventory of the relics contained in Ascoli's Cathedral lists the names of all but one of the

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<sup>116</sup> Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 29.

<sup>117</sup> Beth Williamson, *Reliquary Tabernacles in Fourteenth-Century Italy: Image, Relic and Material Culture* (Suffolk and Rochester: Boydell Press, 2020).

saints from the main and upper tiers of Crivelli's polyptych, perhaps indicating why these particular saints were chosen.<sup>118</sup>

Adopting elements of the Coptic textiles wrapping Emidius's remains was, therefore, not just Crivelli's way of enriching his ornamental vocabulary. His reserved use of the bird design in paintings made for Ascoli implies a shared function between relics and images. Like the precious silk cloths from the Holy Land, Crivelli's silk textiles with their symbols of rebirth enshrine the sacred figure, acting as emblems for their immortal souls and assisting them in the afterlife.<sup>119</sup> Since Emidius's cloths were touch relics by virtue of their physical relationship with his bodily remains, Crivelli's appropriation of their iconography, colour and material transfers their efficacious properties to his textiles. Not only do Crivelli's bird designs thus give the divine referents who wear them embodied presence, and the gift of eternal life through his ornament; but their presence in paintings made for Ascoli, whose patron saint was Emidius, also bestows protection directly from Emidius upon every church that housed the altarpieces displaying these designs.

The association between the oriental cloths and the figure of Emidius was particularly potent in the cathedral polyptych. Emidius wears a silk green cope with the bird design heightened in gold. This was the only occasion that Crivelli chose green for the bird design, linking Emidius's cope directly with the precious, emerald green samite woven with yellow thread that wrapped his relics, housed in the same sacred building. Moreover, Crivelli had never used this shade of green in any previous work, and he would never use it again. Like the oriental samite wrapping the patron saint of Ascoli's performative relics, Crivelli's green cloth wraps the painted body of Emidius, marking him as a figure capable of performing miracles. This choice also speaks to Caffarelli's patronage, his antiquarian and scholarly interests, and perhaps a mutual desire, shared with Crivelli, to link the painted image with Emidius's relics.

Thomas Golsenne has hypothesised that Crivelli's cloths-of-honour function as reliquaries, framing the sacred figure, who acts as the relic.<sup>120</sup> He gave the cloth-of-honour three functions in Crivelli's art: that of embellishing each figure with its own precious backdrop; of distinguishing each figure (which, as Alison Wright has shown, asserts a

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<sup>118</sup> "Tabella Delle Sagre Reliquie, che si conservano in questa Insigne Cattedrale d'Ascoli," 1723, K.24. Archivio Diocesano, Ascoli Piceno.

<sup>119</sup> Bagnoli, "Dressing the Relics," 107. According to Bagnoli, in practice the cloth conceals the relic to "highlight the absence of the sacred (the soul in heaven), but at the same time reveals itself as the saint (his or her material presence)."

<sup>120</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 114-9.

hierarchy between them);<sup>121</sup> and of isolating the sacred being from contact with the worldly environment. The latter, like a reliquary, introduces a “distance that manifests the aura of the cult object.”<sup>122</sup> He has shown that Crivelli was uniquely sensitive towards issues of contact between holy flesh and other entities: the flesh of another saint, precious adornments, and the outside world. For example, in *Saint Francis Collecting the Blood of Christ the Redeemer* (**fig. 64**), the sacred pair are backed by a cloth-of-honour that extends from the top of the cross and folds onto the floor where Francis kneels; they are sealed off from the worldly landscape with its dead trees, and the crumbling building with weeds growing from its crevices. In the V&A *Virgin and Child* (**fig. 1**), Christ’s naked flesh is enveloped in the Virgin’s gold mantle, creating a barrier between his body and the cold stone parapet upon which he sits. Golsenne observes that Crivelli was the only painter to treat the cloth-of-honour in this way. Moreover, Wright states that Crivelli’s work throughout his career in the Marche “represents a sustained engagement [. . .] with the semiotics of cloth.”<sup>123</sup> I argue that Crivelli’s fascination with the potential of precious cloth to act as a marker of sacred presence has its origins in the study of real cloths and their functions in Christian practice. My findings on the relationship between the cloths wrapping Emidius’s remains and Crivelli’s bird designs offer proof of Golsenne’s theory that the artist drew upon the functions of relics and reliquaries. Crivelli learnt from the oriental cloths in several ways. He discovered that their precious material and exquisite facture, and symbols of immortality originating in the East, gave them power. And he learned that this spiritually-effective fabric was activated by its physical contact with the holy body, which it protected and sealed off from the world. He would put this knowledge into practice both in his work for Ascoli and throughout his career.

The evidence I have put forward demonstrates the value of iconology for studying Crivelli, when used in conjunction with other approaches. Crivelli’s ornament and its placement was multivalent, and never vacuous, as has sometimes been suggested.<sup>124</sup> His images are nurtured by their iconography, style, ornament, materials and techniques, which work together to produce meaning. Crivelli scholars must consider all of these facets together. However, traumatised by Lightbown’s heavy-handed application of iconography,

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<sup>121</sup> Wright argues that the hierarchies introduced by Crivelli’s cloths-of-honour take on even greater meaning in his single-field *pale*, where the effect of a segregated space for each figure provided by the polyptych is lost. Wright, *Frame Work*, 176-9.

<sup>122</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 115.

<sup>123</sup> Wright, *Frame Work*, 171.

<sup>124</sup> Curiously, Lightbown claimed that since Crivelli’s pomegranates are only ‘ornaments’ in textiles, as opposed to depicted as real fruits like his peaches and apples, they were devoid of meaning. Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 21.

Crivelli scholars are now wary of using symbolism to interpret his work.<sup>125</sup> Golsenne, for example, repeatedly deplores it as a method, describing it as reductive. His interest, he says, is what Crivelli's ornament does, not what it symbolises.<sup>126</sup> However, my findings show that Crivelli's ornament can be simultaneously symbolic and active. As Stefano Papetti warned, prompted by a scholar who had described past interpretations as "delirious," by ignoring symbolism we risk closing ourselves to the messages that certain iconographic choices may convey about the work and the values of its original audiences.<sup>127</sup>

However, whether all of Crivelli's viewers would have known of the significance of the bird design is questionable. Crivelli may have found the idea that some aspects of his paintings would remain impenetrable to the majority of viewers appealing. As one of the few people who understood the presence of certain elements, he retained a certain degree of possession over his creations after they left his studio; only he had the key that could unlock their meaning. It appears not to have bothered Crivelli whether his viewers could see every detail. The figures emerging from the church held by Thomas Aquinas in the larger altarpiece for San Domenico that can just be made out when observed at eye level would not have been visible when seen from below on the upper tier of the altarpiece (**fig. 65**). The inclusion of impenetrable meanings infused Crivelli's works with power, like an invisible, sacred seal that guaranteed their efficacy.

## Conclusion

I began this chapter by exploring the relationship between devotional life and visual culture in Ascoli. Characterised by their displays of visual and sensory riches, festivals showcased local luxury crafts and in doing so established a direct correlation between material splendour and divine presence. Life for the Marchigian people in Crivelli's day was marked by countless threats, and invoking the protection of the Virgin and Saints was a central concern. As well as offering an antidote to the hardships of everyday life, with their capacity to create what Leopardi calls a "break with the mundane," religious festivals honoured the sacred.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Campbell writes that Lightbown proposed "readings of impossibly complexity" for the Verona Madonna, where "exhaustive symbolic commentary becomes an improbable cipher of vast theological erudition." Stephen J. Campbell, "The Virgin and Child with Infants Bearing Symbols of the Passion," in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, 148.

<sup>126</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 18-19.

<sup>127</sup> Papetti, "I dipinti di Carlo Crivelli," in *Munus Amicitiae: Scritti per il 70 Geneliaco di Floriano Grimaldi*, ed. Gianfranco Paci, Maria Luia Polichetti and Mario Sensi (Loreto: Edizioni Tecnotampa, 2001), 279.

<sup>128</sup> Leopardi, "'Ornamentis Secundum Condecentiam Sui Status,'" 268.

Crivelli studied Ascoli's visual culture with special attention. He drew upon the materials and processes of local craft traditions and devotional objects both to nurture his own practice and to develop an artistic idiom that would speak to the values of his adopted town.

With its complex technical procedures and valuable materials, goldsmithing was the most highly esteemed artistic medium with a strong local tradition. We saw that Crivelli, who was exceptionally sensitive to his artistic environment, emulated the language of goldsmithery in his altarpieces for Ascoli. He depicted pieces of metalwork with increasing physical specificity; he used actual gems, abundant gold leaf, tooling and *pastiglia* to transform his paintings into objects of comparable technical complexity and material value. He reproduced patterns common in reliquaries and processional crosses, such as the foliate designs originating in German engravings, to align his creations with such objects. His ornamental line, tooled gold and details in relief compete in their brilliance with the embossed, enamelled and polished surfaces of gold and silverwork.

Like metalwork, textiles were prized in both religious and secular life. I presented two case studies that demonstrate how Crivelli appropriated the form and function of particular types of cloth. His depictions of orphreys propose a dialogue between the embroidered object and its painted translation about the merits of artistry and craft. Looking closely at the orphrey now in Ascoli's Museo Diocesano, which was worn by Bishop Prospero Caffarelli in Crivelli's day, we saw how Crivelli's painted vestment far surpassed the textile version in the lifelike quality of its apostles lining Emidius's cope in the Cathedral altarpiece. Crivelli painted these gesticulating figures with the same realism as his saints in the altarpiece proper, such that they become extensions of its iconographic program. Yet his orphreys also appropriate aspects of the materiality of actual orphreys, with ribbed *pastiglia* simulating cord and gems, which were often used in ecclesiastical vestments, embellishing each compartment. By breaking down the boundary between luxury craft and painterly illusion, Crivelli asserts himself as both an artisan and a designer with the ability to enliven raw materials.

The embroidered silk cloths of eastern origin wrapping the relics of Saint Emidius inspired Crivelli in other ways. He drew upon their symbols of immortality, associations with the Holy Land, rich materials and colours to produce a new design that signalled the efficacious properties of that which it adorned. I argued that Crivelli must have known of these cloths, due to the close visual and thematic connections between them and his paintings. Crivelli's reference to design elements and iconography that were common in Coptic textiles but little known in European art offer evidence of his source. However, it was

their function as touch relics by nature of their physical contact with Emidius's relics that appears to have influenced the artist most profoundly. Crivelli, probably assisted by Bishop Caffarelli, understood their sacred mechanism, and drew upon it for his paintings, making his textiles with bird designs spiritually-effective ornaments. With their symbols of resurrection, these cloths not only signalled the immortal souls of the divine figures that wore them; they also rendered Crivelli's altarpieces for Ascoli Piceno, all of which include fabrics with elements of their design, efficacious by nature of their association with Emidius's relics.

According to Stephen Campbell,

In the Marches we can make the case that there is a more open contestation about the prestige of painting as opposed to more costly and ostentatious forms of craftsmanship, which Crivelli's painting seeks to encompass but also to mark as the product of an 'author.'<sup>129</sup>

In this chapter, I have explored some of the ways in which Crivelli's paintings draw upon "costly and ostentatious forms of craftsmanship," while asserting his authorial power. Crivelli's work demonstrates that being both a craftsman and a genius were not mutually exclusive, not for him nor his audiences. Moreover, a painting could be materially precious, comprising both gold and gems, while using pictorial illusion to open up the possibility of a metapictorial reality, thus highlighting their immaterial value. When Crivelli left the French word "*auripel*," which corresponds to the Italian word *orpello*, on the ring worn by Saint Louis of Toulouse in his altarpiece for Montefiore dell'Aso (**fig. 66**), painted in the early 1470s for one of Ascoli's neighbouring towns, he appears to have been making this very point. As Francesco De Carolis, who drew attention to this detail recently, has pointed out, the word can mean both a cheap alternative to gold, as well as more broadly an object of low material value that appears richer than it is.<sup>130</sup> My contention is that Crivelli was referencing the by then centuries-old dictum that "The workmanship surpassed the material," as Abbott Suger wrote in the 1140s.<sup>131</sup> Just as the aristocrat-turned-Franciscan Louis of Toulouse — like Crivelli's mendicant viewers and the wealthy financiers of his altarpieces, anxious for their souls in the afterlife — recognised that the real riches were to be found in spiritual life, not in worldly possessions, Crivelli's art presents itself as equivalent in splendour to materially-rich

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<sup>129</sup> Campbell, "On the Importance of Crivelli," 35.

<sup>130</sup> De Carolis, "La rappresentazione della santità tra realismo e devozione nel polittico di Montefiore dell'Aso di Carlo Crivelli," *Venezia Arti* 28, no. 1 (December 2019): 26.

<sup>131</sup> Suger, *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of Saint-Denis and its Art Treasures*, trans. Erwin Panofsky, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 63. On the comparison between the value of precious materials and painted imitations of them, see Jan Bialostocki, "Ars Auro Prior," in *Aesthetics in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Poland: Selected Essays*, eds. Jean G. Harrell and Alina Wierzbiana (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1973), 270-85.

artistic media such as goldsmithing, but superior in facture and depth of meaning. The comparison between the material qualities of objects in other artistic media, and painting's capacity both to encompass and surpass them, is a central theme in Crivelli's work that will emerge throughout the chapters of this thesis.

This chapter has shown that Crivelli's assimilations of goldsmithing and textiles were more than just an opportunity to sound out his own virtuosity. Crivelli worked with exceptional diligence to make his paintings spiritually effective, and this required studying the values of his audiences carefully. He tempered his pictorial language to each commission, connecting it with the local custom of his patrons. In doing so, his ornaments acquired a vivifying potential, giving the holy beings wearing them embodied presence.

## *Chapter Two*

### **Death, Empathy, Memory:**

### **Crivelli's Altarpieces for the Dominicans of Ascoli**

In 1473 Crivelli signed and dated the polyptych for the high altar of the Cattedrale di Sant'Emidio, a prestigious commission indicative of the fame he had achieved in the southern Marche (**fig. 14**). The altarpiece was an impressive debut in Ascoli, one of the wealthiest and most influential cities in the region.<sup>1</sup> With three tiers divided into five compartments representing the Virgin, Child and their heavenly court of saints, the polyptych boasts of Crivelli's prestigious Venetian origins in the signature, while presenting a new visual language designed to resonate with the people of Ascoli. It was this aptitude for combining tradition with innovation that led Crivelli to become the most sought-after painter in the Marche during the second half of the Quattrocento.

Resplendent upon the cathedral's high altar, the altarpiece was a compelling invitation to prospective patrons, one of whom was the Dominican friar, Beato Costanzo da Fabriano (born Costanzo di Meo di Servolo in c.1410, d. 1481).<sup>2</sup> Fra Costanzo was an influential propagator of the Observant movement that had been spreading through Italy since 1388, after Raimondo da Capua, Master General of the Order, called for a return to austerity, asking each province to establish a convent of strict observance.<sup>3</sup> In 1471, Fra Costanzo had recently returned to the convent of San Domenico in Ascoli as its prior, following periods of work in Bologna and Fabriano.<sup>4</sup> Like many other fifteenth-century Dominican priors, he was responsible for the expansion and renovation of the convents in his

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<sup>1</sup> Emanuela Di Stefano notes that Ascoli, along with Camerino and Ancona, were the most prosperous towns in the region. A treaty of 1474 allowed free movement of citizens and goods between them. This situation would have favoured Crivelli's itinerant activity. Di Stefano, "Tappeti e tessuti nel commercio intercontinentale. Il ruolo delle Marche fra XIV e XVI secolo," in Tabibnia, Marchesi and Piccoli, *Crivelli e l'arte tessile*, 63. On Ascoli's economy, see also Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 28-29; Lorenzo Nardi, "Economia agraria e città tra Trecento e Quattrocento. Un caso: I Nardi tra le terre del Bretta e Ascoli," in Nardi and Papetti, *Ascoli ai tempi dell'antica quintana*, 295-311.

<sup>2</sup> For Beato Costanzo's biography, see Tommaso Maria Granello, *Alcune memorie sul Beato Costanzo da Fabriano dei Predicatori* (Ferrara: Domenico Taddeo e figli, 1881); Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 206-207.

<sup>3</sup> William Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), 22-27.

<sup>4</sup> He had spent six years at San Domenico in Ascoli before this from 1459. Raffaele Elia, *Splendori di luce cherubica: Spigolature di storia domenicana in Ascoli Piceno* (Ascoli Piceno: Tipografia Ascolana, 1938), 37.

care, which included supplying them with liturgical furnishings and devotional art.<sup>5</sup> Having been one of the first inhabitants of the cells renovated under Saint Antoninus (born Antonio Pierozzi, 1389-1459) at San Marco in Florence, where Fra Angelico's (c.1395-1455) paintings were fundamentally imbedded into the physical and spiritual fabric of the convent, Fra Costanzo understood the power that art could affect upon the viewer and their daily worship. During his tenure, the Church of San Domenico came to house two splendid polyptychs by Crivelli, which, together with the existing altarpieces, transformed it into what one historian described as a "true treasure house of pictures."<sup>6</sup>

Far from being just ornamental, the images commissioned by the Dominicans during this period were central to their devotional practice.<sup>7</sup> Their charge to spread Christian doctrine principally by preaching demanded both an emotional response to theological subject matter and the ability to recall it when delivering lengthy sermons. This required years of dedicated study and focused prayer sessions, which could be assisted by suitable images. The definition for *imago* given by the Dominican Giovanni di Genova is revealing as to what might have constituted an effective work of art. His late thirteenth-century *Catholicon*, in use during Crivelli's time, states that religious images fulfil the Gregorian requirement to "instruct to the ignorant;" they "elicit a feeling of devotion," since the visible is more effective than things heard; and they embed in the viewer's memory the mystery of the incarnation — "*incarnationis mysterium* [. . .] *in memoria nostra*."<sup>8</sup> While the Gregorian notion of images as books for the illiterate is a dictum of art history, the second and third justifications have opened new lines of enquiry for scholars in recent years.<sup>9</sup> They suggest that images had functions beyond their iconographic content and were valued for their capacity to solicit the emotional and psychological involvement of the beholder. They could

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<sup>5</sup> As prior of San Domenico in Fabriano, Fra Costanzo also requested funds to expand the convent. Romualdo Sassi, "Un particolare nella vita del B. Costanzo da Fabriano," *Studia Picena* 6 (1930): 166-8.

<sup>6</sup> "[. . .] *una vera reggia di arte pittorica*." Raffaele Elia, "S. Domenico nel Piceno (Appunti Storico-Iconografici)," offprint of *Studia Picena* 10 (Fano: Tipografia Sonciniana, 1934), 32.

<sup>7</sup> Key recent studies of mendicant art in Italy are William R. Cook, ed. *The Art of the Franciscan Order in Italy* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005); Joanna Cannon, *Religious Poverty, Visual Riches: Art in the Dominican Churches of Central Italy in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013); Trinita Kennedy, ed. *Sanctity Pictured: The Art of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders in Renaissance Italy* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2015), exhibition catalogue, First Center for the Visual Arts, Nashville; Sally J. Cornelison, Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby and Peter Howards, eds., *Mendicant Cultures in the Medieval and Early Modern World: Word, Deed and Image* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016); Amy Neff, *A Soul's Journey: Franciscan Art, Theology, and Devotion in the Supplicationes Variae* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Medieval Studies, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> As well as the work of the scholars cited in note 7, a key contribution is Walter S. Melion and Lee Palmer Wandel, eds., *Image and Incarnation: The Early Modern Doctrine of the Pictorial Image* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015).

assist the viewer in developing a spiritual connection with the sacred, essential if they were going to convince others to follow the Word of God.

In this chapter, I ask how the visual qualities of Crivelli's polyptychs — including the heightened emotional states and gestures of his figures, and his frenzied use of relief — connect to the devotional and intellectual interests of the Observant Dominicans of Ascoli at their convent in the Piazzarola district. I will show that Crivelli's visual system appealed to the Dominicans' interest in the art of memory, and that his works had a purpose beyond any textual or liturgical referent. Images that most effectively stimulated memory were not mimetic in nature;<sup>10</sup> the visual systems employed in the *ars memorandi* operated on a different level from those of reality.<sup>11</sup>

Crivelli's association with the Franciscans, for whom he made at least twelve altarpieces, demonstrates his sensitivity towards their ideological agenda.<sup>12</sup> Paintings including *The Vision of the Blessed Gabriele* (**fig. 11**) promoted cults around their recently deceased, while others such as *The Immaculate Conception* (**fig. 67**) spread their often contested ideologies. In 1489, Crivelli's services in propagating doctrine were recognised in his receipt of a knighthood of the Golden Militia, a title which, as Andrea Di Lorenzo has shown, was probably conferred upon him by the Ferretti family, his Franciscan patrons in Ancona.<sup>13</sup> If, as Thomas Golsenne has argued, Crivelli "championed the Franciscans in the Marche,"<sup>14</sup> I argue that Crivelli was also sensitive to the image requirements of the Dominicans, for whom he painted four polyptychs.

Although the large altarpiece for San Domenico is my focus (**fig. 24**), I will also consider the role of a smaller work executed several years later for a private chapel (**fig. 25**), as it was made in aesthetic and thematic response to the high altarpiece. These similarities meant that, in the mid-nineteenth century, Prince Anatole Demidoff could frame panels from the respective polyptychs as a single, stylistically homogenous altarpiece for his private chapel in Villa San Donato, Florence.<sup>15</sup> Aside from Lightbown's analysis, which focuses on the

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<sup>10</sup> For a case study, see Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*.

<sup>11</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4-5.

<sup>12</sup> See Introduction, n. 20. For a list of Crivelli's Franciscan and Dominican commissions, see Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 232, n.1.

<sup>13</sup> Di Lorenzo, "Carlo Crivelli ad Ancona," 314-316.

<sup>14</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 102.

<sup>15</sup> On the provenance of the panels, see Federico Zerri, "Cinque Schede per Carlo Crivelli," in *Giorno per giorno nella pittura. Scritti sull'arte dell'Italia centrale meridionale dal Trecento al primo Cinquecento* (Turin: Umberto Allemandi & C., 1992), 160-1; Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 209; Francesco De Carolis, "Crivelli and the Antiquarians: The Rediscovery of the Italian "Primitives" in Eighteenth-and Nineteenth-Century Italy," in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, 96-99.

interpretation of symbolic elements and the particular relevance of each saint, these altarpieces have not featured prominently in recent Crivelli studies, which may be due to a number of reasons, beyond the challenges posed by the prominent ornaments in relief.<sup>16</sup> The panels, which are now dispersed between London's National Gallery, New York's Metropolitan Museum and Budapest's Museum of Fine Arts, have never been lent for exhibition, due to their fragility and the complexity of the nineteenth-century frame in which the panels in London are displayed. There exists, moreover, no contract for either altarpiece and very little documentary evidence.<sup>17</sup> However, the altarpieces belong to a vital moment when Crivelli was exploring new ways to engage his audiences using three-dimensional effects, bringing his treatment of the polyptych format to its limits within a Dominican setting, before working on a succession of smooth-surfaced *pale quadre* for exclusively Franciscan patrons. In the following chapter, I will explore the materials and making of these mixed-media, multi-paneled altarpieces. The origins of the commissions, the altarpieces' original configurations and their locations within the church are of significance to their functions, and it is with these aspects that I shall begin.

## Commission

In 1471 Fra Costanzo requested financial assistance from the commune of Ascoli for urgent repairs to San Domenico. In a letter, recorded in the *Libro di Riformanze* under the date of 8 January 1471, Fra Costanzo argued that the renovated church and convent, possible only with further funds, would "contribute to the honour of Almighty God and Saint Dominic, and to the magnificence of your magnificent Commune."<sup>18</sup> As well as conferring honour, the physical maintenance of an ecclesiastical building was closely connected to the mission of the mendicants to be a moral backbone of the established church, upholding the church's teachings and preventing the spread of heresy. This message is conveyed in Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century account of Pope Innocent's dream, in which the crumbling Lateran basilica was held up by the shoulders of Saint Dominic, convincing him to approve

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<sup>16</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 205-225; 249-260.

<sup>17</sup> In 1552, a fire at Ascoli's Cancelleria Anzianale destroyed the convent's archives. Vincenzo Paoletti, "Memorie Domenicane in Ascoli Piceno," offprint from *Rosario-Memorie Domenicane*, June 1909 (Florence: Tipografia Domenicana, 1909), 36.

<sup>18</sup> Fra Costanzo da Fabriano to the Commune of Ascoli Piceno, 8 January 1471, *Libro di Riformanze*, 120, verso, Archivio di Stato, Ascoli Piceno. This document is transcribed in Paoletti, "Memorie Domenicani," 21.

the Order.<sup>19</sup> The idea of architectural stability as an echo of moral stability must have had a particular resonance in Crivelli's day, when reformers like Fra Costanzo sought to return to a stricter observance of the Rule. The church held by Thomas Aquinas in the larger altarpiece, which has recent repairs to the spire, has, therefore, meaning in the Dominican context beyond its reference to the repair of San Domenico in Ascoli (**fig. 68**).

The amount offered to Fra Costanzo for the repairs to his convent was 12 ducats a year, to be paid using taxes owed to the Commune by the nearby town of Acquasanta. From surviving contracts for Crivelli's altarpieces, we know that he usually requested at least 200 florins (the equivalent to 200 ducats)<sup>20</sup> for an altarpiece, most of which was paid for by donations from wealthy laypeople. The same must be true of the San Domenico polyptychs. The smaller altarpiece was located in the first right-hand chapel of San Domenico when Tullio Lazzari described it in 1724,<sup>21</sup> which had been privately maintained since the church was renovated under Fra Costanzo's supervision in the early 1470s.<sup>22</sup> There are numerous instances in which money and assets were gifted to San Domenico by wealthy laypeople, such as Iachetta di Quintodecimo, who in 1470 left assets in her will to help fund the renovation of the church, and Nardolina di Conti di Montefiore, whose donation of a chapel is recorded by the same notary at the same date.<sup>23</sup> It is almost certain that both altarpieces were funded by similar bequests, perhaps even in part from these very women.<sup>24</sup>

Under Fra Costanzo's direction, San Domenico came to house at least five large altarpieces in his day.<sup>25</sup> The church already housed an early fourteenth-century altarpiece by a local artist named after this work, the "Maestro del Polittico di Ascoli,"<sup>26</sup> and a Venetian polyptych of the early Quattrocento, of which survives a fragment depicting the

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<sup>19</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1993), 432.

<sup>20</sup> Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art. Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Lazzari, *Ascoli in prospettiva colle sue più singolari pitture, sculture, e architetture* (Ascoli: Morganti e Picciotti, 1724), 74.

<sup>22</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 249.

<sup>23</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 2: 84-5, n. 37.

<sup>24</sup> Women were tertiary Dominicans at San Domenico, including Crivelli's wife, who was buried at San Domenico (Coltrinari, "Regesto," 200, doc. 187). On lay access to the high altar in mendicant churches, and on the occasional access of women, see Donal Cooper, "Experiencing Dominican and Franciscan Churches in Renaissance Italy," in Kennedy, *Sanctity Pictured*, 50. Thomas Golsenne suggested that the same "*dottor*" Spinelli de Spinis who approved the funds from the commune to renovate the church commissioned the smaller altarpiece (see n. 18, above), although he does not state why this would be so, nor have I found any evidence to support his hypothesis. Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 58.

<sup>25</sup> Giannino Gagliardi, "Elenco dei quadri già appartenuti ai soppressi Padri Domenicani di Ascoli consegnati a questo Municipio..." in *La Pinacoteca di Ascoli Piceno* (Ascoli Piceno: G.G. Editore, 1988), 61.

<sup>26</sup> Marchi, "Pittura Medioevale," 25-33.

*Lamentation*.<sup>27</sup> A *pala* by the Siennese painter Paolo da Visso depicting *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Siena with Saints James the Lesser, Stephen, Dominic* and a lunette with the *Pietà and two Dominican Saints*, dating to c. 1461-1478 may also have entered the church during Fra Costanzo's tenure.<sup>28</sup> All three works are now in Ascoli's Pinacoteca Comunale. There were also frescoes in the refectory depicting images of the Crucifixion and Dominican saints, which have been attributed to Nicola di Ulisse da Siena, and dated to soon after 1455.<sup>29</sup> Although only fragments remain, it is clear that the cycle was ambitious in terms of its scale and pictorial programme.

The other Dominican church in Ascoli, San Pietro Martire, a conventual church of the Abruzzo Province, contained no such group of painted altarpieces, nor, for that matter, did any other church in Ascoli, which tended instead to have frescoed walls.<sup>30</sup> San Pietro Martire is vast in scale compared to the modestly sized San Domenico, as Emidio Ferretti's 1646 map demonstrates (**fig. 69**). It also contained the coveted holy thorn reliquary encased in elaborate fifteenth-century metalwork, which had been given to Ascoli in c.1290 in exchange for a reliquary containing a finger of San Domenico (**fig. 70**).<sup>31</sup> The Church of San Domenico could not compete with the size of San Pietro Martire, nor with its prestigious relic, but within the relatively small space of the church, the five recorded altarpieces would have produced a striking visual impact.

From 1436 until 1440, the young Costanzo lived in the newly renovated convent of San Marco under its prior, Antonino Pierozzi, the famous Dominican who became archbishop of Florence and was later canonised.<sup>32</sup> It was precisely during this moment that Fra Angelico was active at the convent, painting frescoes in the friars' living quarters and working on the altarpiece for the church's high altar. As a friar at San Marco, Fra Costanzo would have had a devotional fresco painted by Fra Angelico on the wall of his cell, upon which to meditate at length. This must have offered an influential model to the young friar, both in terms of the power and function of devotional imagery, and of Sant'Antonino's activity as a prior: his

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<sup>27</sup> Daniela Ferriani, *Ascoli Piceno. Pinacoteca Civica* (Bologna: Calderini, 1994), n. 6, 30.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 11, 31.

<sup>29</sup> Stefano Papetti, "La pittura ad Ascoli nella prima metà del XV Secolo: Una storia da ricostruire," in Nardi and Papetti, *Ascoli ai tempi dell'antica Quintana*, 213-215.

<sup>30</sup> The exception is the Church of San Francesco, which housed an altarpiece, now lost, dating to 1429. Francesca Coltrinari, "Un'ancona di Bartolomeo di Tommaso e Domenico di Paolo per San Francesco ad Ascoli (1429)," *Paragone* 61 (July 2010): 58-85.

<sup>31</sup> Emidio P. Luzi, "Il reliquiario di Nicola di Campi," *Rassegna artistica abruzzese* 8 (1893): 564-66.

<sup>32</sup> Granello, *Alcune memorie*, 33.

overseeing the renovation of his convent, commissioning of works of art, and interacting with a donor.<sup>33</sup>

In August 1460 the friars of San Domenico requested a subsidiary from the commune to pay for Lombard stonemasons to construct a new wing with fifteen cells and a kitchen.<sup>34</sup> Fra Costanzo must have stayed to oversee this work and then departed, for in 1465 he was in Bologna at the convent of San Domenico, and by 1467 he was back in Fabriano as prior of the convent he started out in. However, by 1470 he had returned to Ascoli and soon set about finding a way to continue renovating San Domenico. Crivelli's work on the first polyptych must have commenced in the early 1470s, if it was the cathedral's altarpiece, dated 1473, that prompted the commission. Crivelli would have begun work on the second and smaller altarpiece for San Domenico soon after 1476, completing it by c.1479. In 1477, a funerary chapel at the site where Crivelli's polyptych was later recorded was reserved for Cola Pizzuti, but eventually erected in Santa Maria Inter Vineas,<sup>35</sup> a fact implying that neither the ownership nor the furnishing of the chapel were yet established at this date. Crivelli's altarpiece must, therefore, have been commissioned shortly afterwards by the chapel's new occupant. Pietro Alemanno's imitations of the smaller altarpiece in his three polyptychs now in Ascoli's Pinacoteca and Museo Diocesano, which span the years 1483 to 1489, offer further evidence that Crivelli's work was complete by the first years of the 1480s.<sup>36</sup>

## Original location and configuration

The first polyptych that Crivelli executed for San Domenico was displayed at the high altar, and stood resplendent for the friars to see from 1476 until the mid-eighteenth century (**fig. 24**). The first mention of the altarpiece in 1724, when the church was as Fra Costanzo had left it, describes its location — “at the end in the choir, which surrounds the high altar” — authorship, date, and the relief of Saint Peter's cope, keys and the clasps on the book he holds.<sup>37</sup> Crivelli's altarpiece must have produced an astonishing visual impact within the restricted space of the choir. A plan of San Domenico that was drawn up shortly before it was turned into a school at the beginning of the twentieth century demonstrates how restricted a space the choir enclosure was, particularly bearing in mind that it would have been

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<sup>33</sup> Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*.

<sup>34</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 2:92.

<sup>35</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 249.

<sup>36</sup> Stefano Papetti and Sandra Di Provvio, eds., *Pietro Alemanno. Un pittore austriaco nella Marca* (Milan: Federico Motta Editore, 2005), 120, 148, 170.

<sup>37</sup> Lazzari, *Ascoli in prospettiva*, 76. Author's translation from the Italian.

separated from the nave by a *tramezzo* in Crivelli's day (**fig. 71**).<sup>38</sup> When the panels were examined under studio conditions at the National Gallery in 2017, it was striking how Crivelli's paintings befit observation at close quarters, from where the details of his exquisite facture can be appreciated.

Lightbown has suggested plausible changes to the order of the figures from how they are currently displayed within the Demidoff frame:

The Baptist, as the Precursor of Christ, will have been placed on the Virgin's right hand, and St Peter will have adjoined him in the second place of honour on the Virgin's right [thus switching the current positions of these saints]. St Dominic, as the founder of the Order and patron saint of the church, must have been on the Virgin's left hand, preceding St Catherine, as St Francis precedes her on the Montefiore altarpiece [thus also switching the current position of these panels].<sup>39</sup>

The current ordering of the saints on the upper tier probably follows the original configuration for reasons of hierarchy.<sup>40</sup> The upward gazes of Saint Catherine on the lower tier, and Saints Thomas Aquinas and Francis on the upper tier, suggest that they were looking up towards an image of Christ's Lamentation, which would have been slightly raised above the upper tier saints, just as the central panel on the main tier is slightly taller than the others.

The association of the *Pietà* in the Metropolitan Museum in New York with the panels of the larger altarpiece in the National Gallery is based on stylistic evidence, the fact that the panel is the same width as the *Virgin and Child*, and its provenance from Ascoli (**fig. 72**).<sup>41</sup> Scholars have expressed concern that the tooled pattern in the gold ground of this panel differs from that of the London panels but, as Anna Bovero first noted, Crivelli varied the tooling in the grounds of the panels for the church of San Domenico in Camerino (**fig. 20**).<sup>42</sup> Moreover, I would suggest that Crivelli had a tendency to treat his Lamentation scenes as separate entities from other panels of the same altarpiece, perhaps since the figures

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<sup>38</sup> On the *tramezzo*, see Marcia B. Hall, "The Tramezzo of the Italian Renaissance, revisited" in *Thresholds of the Sacred. Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical, and Theological Perspectives on Religious Rood Screens, East and West*, ed. Sharon E.J. Gerstel (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2006), 213-232. Although San Domenico received a Baroque makeover in c.1766, it is unlikely that the scale and setting of the choir enclosure would have changed significantly because there are two structural columns close to where the *tramezzo* would have been. Moreover, Lazzari's description of the choir stalls encasing the high altar evokes its narrowness.

<sup>39</sup> On the original configuration of the panels, and the problem of the Saint John the Baptist panel, which was not mentioned in Lazzari's description of the altarpiece, see Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 209-10, and Zeri, "Cinque Schede," 162.

<sup>40</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 219-225.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 209-210.

<sup>42</sup> Bovero, *L'opera completa*, 67.

occupy a different temporal dimension; the other saints, the Virgin and Child are 'present' as intercessory beings before the viewer, while lunettes depicting the Lamentation are effectively narrative scenes, recalling a specific moment recounted in the gospels. Unlike some of the other saints, including the Virgin in the principal panel, figures in Crivelli's Lamentation scenes never make eye contact with the viewer. Crivelli's different treatment of the *Pietà* may also relate to his own personal devotion towards the dead Christ, since he on occasion signed such depictions, despite these panels belonging to larger ensembles that included signed images of the Virgin and Child.<sup>43</sup>

Although Lightbown states that the predella must be lost, I would suggest that the larger altarpiece for San Domenico had no predella, setting it apart from the polyptych that was displayed in the cathedral just 250 meters away.<sup>44</sup> Together with the scalloped edges of the lost frames, indicated by the incisions in the gold leaf, and the fact that the Lamentation was raised slightly above the saints on the upper tier, this differentiates the Dominican altarpiece and its now lost frame from the polyptych in the cathedral, still housed in its original frame (**fig. 14**). As I demonstrated in Chapter One, aspects such as the reduced number of orphrey panels on Saint Peter's cope compared to Emidius, and fewer gems embedded than in the Cathedral polyptych, are in keeping with the later altarpiece being a more modest commission. The typology of the larger polyptych for San Domenico would, I suggest, have resembled Jacobello del Fiore's polyptych with Saint Augustine for the church of Santa Maria la Nova in Cellino Attanasio near Teramo, 23 miles south of Ascoli, (c.1430, Museo Nazionale, L'Aquila), and Antonio and Bartolomeo Vivarini's polyptych for Osimo, near Ancona (**fig. 73**), neither of which have a predella and have slightly taller central panels.

I also disagree with Lightbown that the smaller altarpiece had a cimasa,<sup>45</sup> and would suggest instead that it was modelled on a pentatych format also used by Crivelli's predecessors in the Veneto: for example, Antonio Vivarini and Giovanni d'Alemagna's *Nativity Altarpiece* (**fig. 8**), as well as Francesco Squarcione's *Lazzara Polyptych* (1449-52, Musei Civici, Padua), both of which retain their original carpentry.<sup>46</sup> That the smaller altarpiece had just five panels is backed up by a document dating to 1648, which includes a description of the panels in their original frame, indicating their order: "*la Vergine santissima col suo figliuolo Giesù nostro redentore e con s. Gerolamo, s. Michele, s. Pietro martyr et s.*

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<sup>43</sup> See App. One.

<sup>44</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 225.

<sup>45</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 249.

<sup>46</sup> Davide Banzato, "Il Polittico De Lazara di Francesco Squarcione. Considerazioni sullo stato di conservazione, sul restauro, sulla tecnica e sulla cornice," in De Nicolò Salmazo, *Francesco Squarcione*, 79-87.

*Lucia*.”<sup>47</sup> The three complete pentatychs by Alemanno in Ascoli’s Pinacoteca and Museo Diocesano, which are based on Crivelli’s work at San Domenico, also suggest that this was the original configuration of the smaller altarpiece.<sup>48</sup>

Alemanno’s striking use of *pastiglia* for the Virgin’s mantle in the two polyptychs now in the Pinacoteca Civica, as well as the one he painted for San Domenico dated 1488, signing himself as Crivelli’s “disciple” on the central panel, which survives in a private collection (**fig. 74**), strengthen the association of Crivelli’s signed but undated *Virgin and Child* in Budapest (**fig. 75**) with the panels of in the National Gallery, which include *Saints Jerome, Michael, Peter Martyr, and Lucy* (**fig. 25**).<sup>49</sup> The *pastiglia* decoration on the Virgin’s mantle of Crivelli’s Budapest panel extends over its entire surface. The fact that the other panels of Alemanno’s Ascoli polyptychs also closely imitate those of Crivelli’s smaller altarpiece in the National Gallery, in particular, *Saints Michael and Jerome* of the polyptych dated 1489 in the Pinacoteca, further demonstrates the connection between Crivelli’s Budapest panel and the ones in London.<sup>50</sup>

With the panels enclosed in their original structures and lit with flickering candles against grey stone walls, Crivelli’s polyptychs in the Church of San Domenico must have appeared as what Alison Wright has called “a collection of projecting presences.”<sup>51</sup> The figures were separate entities within the microcosms of their niches, yet united by the ornamental scheme of the altarpiece and the various ways in which their poses and locations acknowledge the intercessory Virgin and Child on the lower tier, and the apparition of the Lamentation scene up above. They are heavenly apparitions, but exhibit a wealth of bodily and sartorial detail, convincing the viewer that they once lived. They seem almost to bristle within the confines of their niches, projecting forward from the flat gold ground, and their feet and drapery push at the boundary of the painted scene. Yet their flesh and clothing, composed of meticulously hatched tempera and distinctly outlined in black, is flattened, rendering them otherworldly beings of Crivelli’s invention.

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<sup>47</sup> “The Holy Virgin with her Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, and with Saints Jerome, Michael, Peter Martyr and Lucy.” Giannino Gagliardi, *L’Annunciazione di Carlo Crivelli ad Ascoli (30 Marzo – 30 Giugno 1996)* (Ascoli Piceno: Giannino e Giuseppe Gagliardi Editori, 1996), 5.

<sup>48</sup> See n. 36, above.

<sup>49</sup> Papetti and Di Provvido eds., *Pietro Alemanno*, 144.

<sup>50</sup> Zeri, “Cinque scheme per Carlo Crivelli,” 163.

<sup>51</sup> Wright, “Crivelli’s Divine Materials,” 62.

## Life and death at San Domenico

While the contemplation of Christ's Passion, and themes of life and death more generally were and are central to all aspects of Christian devotion, they appear to have had a particular resonance at San Domenico, which may have impacted upon the ways in which the friars contemplated Crivelli's altarpieces. Fra Costanzo's biographers recall that he recited daily the entire Office of the Dead, which he was only required to recite thirty times a year, or at the death of a member of the house or an influential member of the Order.<sup>52</sup> This suggests that Fra Costanzo, and perhaps by extension the friars at San Domenico, who were around fifteen in number, were unusually scrupulous in their responsibilities towards the souls of the deceased in purgatory, which also afforded them the opportunity to contemplate their own mortality. Fra Costanzo's biographers also record that he wore a cilice, an undergarment made of coarse animal hair designed to irritate the skin, and would frequently flagellate himself with a scourge, a whip with iron points, which was preserved as a relic after his death.<sup>53</sup> This self-discipline was designed to punish the sins of the flesh and to enable a degree of empathy with Christ's suffering.<sup>54</sup> In reading the Office of the Dead and disciplining the flesh, Fra Costanzo (and the other friars engaged in such activities) would have brought physical and psychological understanding to images of Christ's Passion.

In fact, a special devotion at San Domenico for Christ's Passion, and the Crown of Thorns in particular, may have originated in the thirteenth century. Marco D'Attanasio has suggested that the antiphonals now in Ascoli's Biblioteca Comunale "Giulio Gabrielli," which come from San Domenico, may have been illuminated in reference to the Holy Thorn reliquary (**fig. 70**), in the possession of the Dominicans of Ascoli since the late thirteenth century.<sup>55</sup> On a sheet bearing the initial S, an angel with long, feathered wings offers the Crown of Thorns to Christ, who humbly accepts his fate (**fig. 76**). D'Attanasio suggests that both antiphonal and reliquary were located in San Domenico from the late thirteenth century until the latter was moved to San Pietro Martire, the other Dominican convent in Ascoli, when building work on it was completed in the 1330s.<sup>56</sup> The association between

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<sup>52</sup> See "Chapter three: suffrages for the dead" in the Dominican Constitutions in Hood, *Fra Angelico*, app., 291.

<sup>53</sup> Paoletti, "Memorie Domenicane," 38-9.

<sup>54</sup> Andrew Chen, *Flagellant Confraternities and Italian Art, 1260-1610: Ritual and Experience* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2018).

<sup>55</sup> D'Attanasio, "Aggiunte alle miniature marchigiane. I frammenti tardoduecenteschi di Antifonario della Biblioteca Comunale di Ascoli Piceno," *Rivista di Storia della Miniatura* 19 (2015): 39-40.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

illumination and reliquary can be strengthened by comparing the angel bearing the actual relic to the angel bearing the crown of thorns, tooled into the burnished gold of the illumination, both of which wear classical robes and have the same elongated feathered wings.

While the reliquary was moved to San Pietro Martire, it is likely that the choir book remained in use throughout the fifteenth century, and thus would have continued to exert an influence on devotion at San Domenico and during the Feast of the Crown of Thorns more specifically.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the close proximity of the prestigious relic itself at the other Dominican house in Ascoli, albeit no longer under the same roof as Crivelli's altarpieces, would have informed the ways in which the friars contemplated images of Christ's Passion. As a relic, the Crown of Thorns — conceived by Christ's tormentors as a torture instrument — is transformed into sublime, miracle-working matter. Its gothic, metalwork casing functions as evidence of its sacred power. Similarly, the friars' instruments of physical torture, which too later acquired the status of relics, were a means of accessing spiritual beauty: Fra Costanzo's biographers record his belief that "depriving the body nourishes the spirit."<sup>58</sup> This connection between pain and the sublime is echoed in depictions of the dead Christ in gruesome detail that were rendered beautiful by gold leaf and precious stones. Crivelli's *Pietà* from the altarpiece for Porto San Giorgio dating to 1470 renders the Crown of Thorns in gilt *pastiglia*, a technique that is usually reserved for precious vestments and saints' metalwork attributes (**fig. 77**).<sup>59</sup>

Positioned upon the high altar, where the Eucharist was celebrated and the Host was consumed, Crivelli's altarpiece provided a visual stimulus that would have prompted the friars to contemplate Christ's sacrifice. This message would have been aided by the central panel of the Virgin and Child, which shows the Christ Child sleeping in the lap of his Mother, who lifts the diaphanous veil that covers him, perhaps encouraging the viewer to associate it with the shroud that would one day cover his dead body (**fig. 78**).<sup>60</sup> The Christ Child's bowed head mirrors the stony head of the cherub in the frieze below, which turns upwards to look

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<sup>57</sup> Cannon notes that while new observant convents established at the end of the fourteenth century tended to commission new choir books, those that had been established prior to this (San Domenico was established in 1257) tended to continue using their late thirteenth or early fourteenth-century choir books for some centuries. Cannon, *Religious Poverty*, 121.

<sup>58</sup> "...quell che si toglie al corpo si ridà allo spirito..." Granello, *Alcune memorie*, 32.

<sup>59</sup> This approach towards Christ's body and its torture instruments is played out in other Venetian works, such as Michele Giambono's *Man of Sorrows* (c.1430, Metropolitan Museum of Art) in which not only the Crown of Thorns but also Christ's blood is heightened in *pastiglia*.

<sup>60</sup> Alternatively, Paul Hills has suggested that the triangular shape of the veil forms a miniature tent, signifying the *velum* that once hid the Holy of Holies and was torn apart by Christ's sacrificial death. Hills, *Veiled Presence*, 93.

at him, producing an allegory about death and the afterlife.<sup>61</sup> That Crivelli saw the frieze, and the parapet more generally, as a site upon which to explore the relationship between life and death is suggested by the polyptych for the Dominicans of Camerino (1482), in which a message of *memento mori* is expressed by the human and bovine skulls — ancient symbols of sacrifice — interlaced with succulent fruit which hang from ribbons tied to the frieze (**fig. 79**).<sup>62</sup> Here, what would be sculptural relief is enlivened at the hand of the painter, who transforms it into real fruit and skulls.<sup>63</sup>

But nowhere was death so viscerally present in Crivelli's altarpiece than in the representation of the dead Christ in the *cimasa* forming the uppermost section of the altarpiece (**fig. 72**), "visually framing and dramatising," in Suzannah Biernoff's phrase, "the reincarnation of the body and blood of Christ during the mass."<sup>64</sup> Lamented by the now aged Virgin, Saints John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene, Christ is at the centre, his limp body propped up behind the parapet and supported by the three figures. The pallor of his flesh contrasts with the pink skin of his attendants; the gaping wound in his side splays open and drips blood, and his stiff, rigor-mortis hands drape over his Mother's shoulder and the parapet with the marks of the Crucifixion in full view. His mouth hangs open and his eyes are vacant. His pubic hair emerging from the loin cloth is a reminder of his humanity, triggering an empathetic response in the viewer.<sup>65</sup> The living figures are in a state of anguish and have large, viscous tears rolling down their cheeks; the Madonna's mouth is slightly ajar with her tongue protruding, as she embraces her Son and looks closely at his face, searching for signs of life; John the Evangelist appears from behind, with his eyes rolling back and his tongue hanging out, almost in a state of convulsion, while the Magdalene is more reflective and lifts Christ's arm, attempting through touch to comprehend his physical state, as she would also attempt after the Resurrection. While the Virgin, Child and saints in their niches are present before the viewer, ready to receive their prayers, the saints of the *Pietà* are oblivious to any communication beyond the altarpiece, absorbed as they are in their group lamentation. The emotional intensity of their visceral responses to the dead Christ was an example for the friars to follow.

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<sup>61</sup> As noted in Campbell, "Grace in the Making," 39.

<sup>62</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 285.

<sup>63</sup> On this iconography, see Ch. Six, 196-7.

<sup>64</sup> Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 143.

<sup>65</sup> On Christ's body hair in Jan van Eyck's work, and its capacity to stimulate empathy, see Ann-Sophie Lehmann, "Small Hairs. Meaning and Material of a Multiple Detail in the *Ghent Altarpiece's* Adam and Eve Panels," in *Van Eyck Studies. Papers Presented at the Eighteenth Symposium for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting*, Christina Currie et al., eds. (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 115.

## Empathetic responses

In his commentary on the Rule of Augustine, the thirteenth-century Dominican friar Hubert of Romans wrote that “*devotiones affectus*” — feelings of devotion — make prayer more effective.<sup>66</sup> Aquinas and Bonaventure, who were echoed by the Dominican friar Giovanni di Genova, also included *devotiones affectus* in their justifications for images, suggesting that works of art could be used not only for didactic purposes but also to stimulate certain emotions in the viewer.<sup>67</sup> What kinds of images may have appealed to the friar’s devotional needs? The Observant mendicants in particular sought to access heightened psychological states through physical deprivation, as we have seen. They also sought to achieve an impassioned physical and emotional state during prayer, which could be facilitated by the internal generation of mental images, often brought about by contemplating an actual painted or sculpted image. Fra Costanzo’s first biographer, the Dominican Leandro Alberti, describes in his 1517 account how the friars would often witness Costanzo at prayer throughout the night, erupting with cries, tears and heavy breathing.<sup>68</sup> It was this ability to achieve a state of “mental abstraction” that enabled spirituals like Fra Costanzo to experience visions, such as that of his teacher, Saint Antoninus, ascending to heaven.<sup>69</sup> Tears in particular were believed to be an outward sign of inner grace bestowed upon an individual by God in response to authentic suffering, which enabled them to repent for their sins.<sup>70</sup> With their impossibly large and waxy tears, Crivelli’s lamenting saints may have assisted the secretion of tears in the friars. Was Crivelli drawing upon an understanding that the emotions he represented were capable of affecting the viewer, triggering an empathetic response?

The ways in which physical states depicted in images can trigger a similar state when viewed in reality is a subject that has been explored by scholars working across disciplines, particularly those interested in pain and the senses.<sup>71</sup> While modern neuroscience proves

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<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Cannon, *Religious Poverty*, 53.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Granello, *Alcune memorie*, 38.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>70</sup> Giuseppe Capriotti, “Ce sta picto. Simboli e figure nella pittura di Vittore Crivelli e del suo tempo,” in Coltrinari and Delpriori, *Vittore Crivelli*, 77-8; Federica Veratelli, “Lacrime dipinte, lacrime reali. Rappresentare il dolore nel Quattrocento: modello fiammingo, ricezione italiana,” *Storia dell’arte* 113-14 (2006): 5-34.

<sup>71</sup> For example, Geoffrey D. Schott, “Pictures of Pain: Their Contribution to the Neuroscience of Empathy,” *Brain* 138, no. 3 (2015): 812-820; David Freedberg and Vittorio Gallese, “Motion, Emotion and Empathy in Esthetic Experience,” *Trends Cogn Sci* 11 (2005): 197-203. Use of theories of empathy by art historians in relation to physical responses to viewing works of art has its roots in the late-

that human neural networks are enlisted in empathetic responses to images of pain,<sup>72</sup> the Franciscan Order itself was predicated upon the belief that Francis's vision of the Crucified Christ led him to experience the pain of His wounds, manifesting in the stigmata. This demonstrates an innate understanding during the late medieval and early modern period of what is now scientifically proven. Francis's stigmata also prove that vision was understood as inextricably connected to other senses, and that the things viewed could bring about physiological changes in the beholder.<sup>73</sup> As Biernoff writes,

Vision, in the medieval world, did not leave the viewer untouched or unchanged [. . .]. Given that perception was defined as assimilation, the objects of one's attention were of critical importance. To see was to become similar to one's object.<sup>74</sup>

As visual objects, works of art are thus implicated in significant ways in the sight-response mechanisms that formed part of religious practice, suggesting that Crivelli's hyper-real representations of bodies in grief, crying tears with mouths ajar and tongues protruding, would have physically and psychologically affected the friars at San Domenico.

The boundaries between art and life are therefore broken down, as what is represented is reproduced in reality, triggered by the viewer's empathetic response to the image. With representations of the Passion, art and life could also merge in other ways. Scenes from the Passion were acted out in theatrical plays that took place throughout Italy during the fifteenth century known as *sacre rappresentazioni*, during which paintings and sculptures with articulated limbs and tongues would take on the role of Christ, and viewers would become mourning witnesses.<sup>75</sup> While *sacre rappresentazioni* probably imitated what was depicted in paintings, artists were themselves responsible for providing the props and figures involved in the staging of these plays.<sup>76</sup> Of course, impassioned responses also characterised the mourning rituals focused upon the recently deceased. In Ascoli Piceno, the statutes regulated the work of professional mourners – women who were hired to weep, sing, cry and pray at each stage of the post-mortem process: immediately at death, during the preparations and the unfolding of the funeral, and over the subsequent days.<sup>77</sup> As Giulio

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nineteenth-century rise of physiological and psychological aesthetics. See Juliet Koss, "On the Limits of Empathy," *The Art Bulletin* 88, no. 1 (2006): 139-57. My thanks to Maria Alambritis for drawing my attention to the material on nineteenth-century empathy and aesthetics.

<sup>72</sup> Schott, "Pictures of pain," 812-820.

<sup>73</sup> See Ch. four, n. 101.

<sup>74</sup> Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*, 137.

<sup>75</sup> On *sacre rappresentazioni* in the Marche, see Dante Cecchi, "Una sacra rappresentazione nella Marca (secoli XIII – XIX)," *Studi Maceratesi* 22 (1986): 215-250.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>77</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:195.

Cantalamessa suggested, it is possible that Crivelli drew inspiration from these women for his Lamentation scenes.<sup>78</sup> On the other hand, the viewers of Crivelli's Lamentations, who may have witnessed such outbursts of emotion towards the deceased in reality, brought a sensory understanding to the image, just as the image could, in return, trigger an empathetic response in them. The fluid and interchangeable boundaries between art and reality, one of the central mechanisms of Crivelli's work, is therefore integral to the function of his Lamentation scenes. Although such impassioned responses to the Dead Christ might have been more probable during private prayer, the group Lamentation scene was fitting for the space it occupied on the high altar. Here, surrounded by the choir enclosure from which they could admire the exemplary piety of the Virgin, the Magdalene and John the Evangelist, the friars of San Domenico could partake in their suffering.

The didactic function of Crivelli's altarpieces for San Domenico is played out in other ways. While a Lamentation scene could encourage compassionate devotion, the saints in their separate niches represented an array of exemplary Christians, whose lives were celebrated for their charity, celibacy, preaching, study, austerity and faith. The representation of early Dominicans alongside the Virgin and Child, the apostles and the first martyrs, played on the desires of the friars to join these holy personages in the afterlife. Fra Costanzo's portrayal as Saint Dominic was proof that this desire was within reach, through profound piety and strict observation of the Rule. Unlike Crivelli's other depictions of Dominic, in which he is a young man, in this altarpiece he is elderly with lined, transparent skin, no hair and deep-set eyes (**fig. 80**).<sup>79</sup> His face and build resemble other depictions of Fra Costanzo, suggesting that this is a portrait of the Dominican prior of Ascoli.<sup>80</sup> After Fra Costanzo's death in 1481, soon after which his remains were moved to a tomb above ground more befitting of the miracles they continued to perform, this message would have acquired an even greater potency: the former prior of San Domenico, who lived and worshipped alongside the other

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<sup>78</sup> Cantalamessa, *Conferenze d'arte* (Rome: Alberto Stock, 1926), 212. However, this impassioned figural dialogue, which also features in Crivelli's altarpieces for other cities, was also inspired by earlier examples in Venetian painting, such as Michele Giambono's *Pietà* now in a private collection (illustrated in Mauro Lucco, *La pittura nel Veneto: Il Quattrocento* (Milan: Electa, 1989), fig. 122.). Other artists of Crivelli's generation, including Mantegna and Bellini, also drew upon such models in their emotionally-charged depictions of the *Pietà*.

<sup>79</sup> The other depictions of Dominic belong to the altarpiece made for Fermo of 1470, now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, and the triptych for Camerino of 1482, now in the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan (**fig. 37**).

<sup>80</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 207; Elia, "S. Domenico nel Piceno," 29.

friars, had now joined the ranks of saintly Dominicans and was, like them, immortalized in Crivelli's image.<sup>81</sup>

In his guise as Dominic, Fra Costanzo bows his head, lowers his eyes and clasps his free hand to his chest in a devout gesture before the Virgin and Child. All of Crivelli's other saints hold two attributes in their hands, with the exception of Francis, who also brings his hands to his chest as he prays before the Dead Christ, and John the Baptist, who points to the scroll, both gestures that relate directly to their saintly identities (**figs. 81, 82**). This suggests a certain specificity with regards to Dominic's gesture. William Hood has argued that Fra Angelico's frescoes in the Novitiate cells at San Marco, which were complete by 1442 in time for Fra Costanzo to inhabit one, were based on the thirteenth-century treatise on prayer, *De modo orandi*. This book taught Dominican novices how to prepare psychologically for preaching by adopting the same prayer gestures as those of their founder.<sup>82</sup> Hood suggests convincingly that the fresco in Cell 17, for example (**fig. 83**), which shows Saint Dominic with his hands clasped in front of his chest, illustrates the fifth mode of praying described in *De modo orandi*, which, according to the text, encouraged meditation.<sup>83</sup> Did Fra Costanzo, who may have learnt the effectiveness of adopting the prayer gestures of Saint Dominic whilst a novice at San Marco, specifically request to be portrayed with this meditative gesture for its significance according to *De modo orandi*? If so, a complexity is introduced to this image, for it is at once an image of Saint Dominic with a gesture characteristic of his own piety (the *De modo orandi* is said to have been based on first-hand observations of Saint Dominic's prayer attitudes) and an image of Fra Costanzo himself adopting Saint Dominic's gesture, which might in turn have been imitated by the friars at San Domenico. Again, the boundaries between art and life are rendered fluid by Crivelli's work.

Hood has suggested that when Fra Angelico painted friars witnessing scenes such as the Annunciation, the scene witnessed was not just a representation of a biblical text, but also the friar's re-imagining of that scene during prayer.<sup>84</sup> This idea introduces a degree of separation between Fra Costanzo as Dominic in Crivelli's altarpiece and the Virgin and Child.

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<sup>81</sup> The transferal of miraculous bodily remains from an underground burial site to a raised tomb within a church was common practice at this time. See Sally J. Cornelison, *Art and the Relic Cult of St. Antoninus in Renaissance Florence* (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012). On Fra Costanzo's tomb and the image that apparently accompanied it, see Paoletti, "Memorie domenicane," 108; Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 260.

<sup>82</sup> Hood, "Saint Dominic's Manners of Praying: Gestures in Fra Angelico's Cell Frescoes at S. Marco," *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 2 (June 1986): 195-206.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 200. Mode Five, whose gesture is "standing upright, hands before chest," is the attitude of meditation. *Ibid.*, 205, App. One.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

Although united in the polyptych, the Virgin and Child occupy different realms, like the lamenting saints above. Unlike the intercessory saints, Crivelli's depiction of the Virgin and Child may have been understood by the friars at San Domenico as visionary — figures that they would recall in their imaginations during prayer.<sup>85</sup> The two mendicant saints thus meditate before their respective subjects of devotion: Francis before the Dead Christ, whose pain he shared in, and Dominic before the Virgin, who was the protectress of the Order.

## Books, real and painted

While looking at images could stimulate certain types of piety in the beholder, preparing them emotionally for preaching, reading was also considered to be a pious activity and one that was necessary for ordination, equipping Dominican friars with the knowledge that could be used to spread orthodox doctrine. Books play an important role in Crivelli's altarpieces for San Domenico, which represent a total of six prominent tomes in the hands of saints celebrated for their preaching and scholarship, suggesting an awareness of the importance of reading (**figs. 24, 25**). Crivelli's books are presented as three-dimensional, physical objects. Painted in tempera and ornamented with mordant gilding and *pastiglia*, they are heavy, dense tomes with metal studs on their leather or velvet bindings (**fig. 48**). Their thick parchment or vellum pages crinkle and flutter open as the saints struggle to hold their weight with a single hand (**fig. 84**). In some cases, books are held open and pushed to the forefront of the image for the viewer to see, as with the tome held by Thomas Aquinas (**fig. 85**). Unlike other attributes, which demanded a degree of imagination from the viewer in order to grasp their properties, books were part of the everyday lives of the friars at San Domenico, which had an impressive library recalled by Sebastiano Andreantonelli in his 1627 history of Ascoli: "*Est in dicto Monasterio antiqua Bibliotheca, maiori custodienda diligentia.*"<sup>86</sup> Part of the contents survive in Ascoli's Biblioteca Comunale Giulio Gabrielli. Hitherto ignored in the scholarship on Crivelli, and little studied by other historians, the

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<sup>85</sup> This concept may help to explain why many Venetian altarpieces of the period, several examples of which were in the Marche, show the central figures in a different medium from the other figures. Typically, it is sculpted and the lateral figures painted, such as the *Polyptych with Saint Anthony* by Antonio Vivarini and the sculptor Domenico Indivini for the Confraternity of Sant'Antonio, Pesaro, now in the Pinacoteca Vaticana (1464), but the media could also be reversed. The implication is that the central figure takes on qualities different from the other figures: bodily and present, if sculpted, and ephemeral and absent, if painted. On painted and sculpted altarpieces in renaissance Italy, see Iris Wenderholm, *Bild und Berührung: Skulptur und Malerei auf dem Altar der italienischen Frührenaissance* (Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2006).

<sup>86</sup> "There is an old library in this monastery, safeguarded with great care." Andreantonelli, *Historiae Asculane* (1673; repr., Bologna: Forni Editori, 1968), 215.

manuscripts offer precious testimony of the friars' learning activities and suggest ways in which their reading material may have informed their experience of Crivelli's images.

Scholars rarely comment on Crivelli's depictions of books and their lively pseudoscript. However, Stefano Papetti and Marina Massa have addressed the presence of books in the work of Carlo's brother, Vittore. Both argue convincingly that Vittore's patrons requested that even saints whose traditional attribute was not the book, such as the Magdalene, are represented holding weighty volumes in order to promote an image of erudition that would help the Observants to avoid accusations of ignorance from the Conventual members of the Order.<sup>87</sup> This anxiety is perhaps implicit in Giacomo della Marca's accumulation of a library for the convent of Santa Maria delle Grazie that he founded in his home town of Montepandone, which contained not only scholastic writings, but also works of Roman history and classical literature for the friars' consultation.<sup>88</sup> When Vittore painted Giacomo della Marca in his study, it was the Franciscan's legacy as a scholar that he chose to emphasise (**fig. 86**).

The case of the Observant Franciscans marks an interesting point of divergence from their Dominican equivalents. I would argue that the presence of books in Crivelli's altarpieces for San Domenico was not directly connected to a desire to appear erudite, as it was for the Franciscans, but rather was emblematic of the convent's history, current activities and the Order's identity as a whole, in which scholarship played a fundamental role. Unlike the Franciscans, who followed their own rule and preached on penitence and moral issues, the Dominicans followed the rule St. Augustine, a Doctor of the Church, and were founded to preach against heresy by spreading orthodox doctrine.<sup>89</sup> They were therefore required to expound complex theological issues, which were grasped through years of dedicated study. Several of San Domenico's priors were noted theologians, including Fra Costanzo, producing exegetical writings which would have been absorbed into learning at San Domenico.<sup>90</sup> This

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<sup>87</sup> Papetti, "Maria Maddalena nella pittura di Carlo Crivelli e dei crivelleschi" in *La Santa Maria Maddalena tra peccato e penitenza*, eds. Vittorio Sgarbi and Stefano Papetti (Milan: Silvana editori, 2016), exhibition catalogue, Museo Antico Tesoro della Santa Casa, Loreto, 31-33; Massa, "Vittore Crivelli e la committenza marchigiana," 47.

<sup>88</sup> Cecilia Sansolini, "S. Giacomo raccogliitore di codici e le vicende della sua libreria" in *Atti del terzo convegno di studi in onore di S. Giacomo della Marca – 13 novembre 1993* (Montepandone: Comitato celebrazioni del VI centenario della nascita di S. Giacomo della Marca, 1994), 25-61; Saturnino Loggi, *I codici di San Giacomo della Marca nel Museo Civico di Montepandone: catalogo* (Ancona: Regione Marche, Centro regionale per i beni culturali, 2000); Antonio Manfredi, "Codici di Santa Maria delle Grazie a Montepandone ora in Vaticana. Aggiunte ed esclusioni," *Picenum seraphicum* 2 (2002): 103-125.

<sup>89</sup> Hood, "Saint Dominic's Manners of Praying," 197.

<sup>90</sup> Among them was Johannes Baptista Gratiadei (d.1341), who wrote a number of famous commentaries on Aristotle and Aquinas, all of which were published in the late fifteenth century. For a

set the convent of the Lombard Province apart from the other Dominican house of the Abruzzo province in Ascoli, which was no such centre of scholarship and learning. In his catalogue of Dominican writings by authors of the Lombard province (1691), Andrea Rovetta recorded that Fra Costanzo's writings included a book of temporal sermons, a book of sermons on the saints, a biography of the Blessed Corradino of Brescia, his first teacher, and other writings on saints of the Dominican Order.<sup>91</sup> Rovetta goes on to list a bibliography of other celebrated Dominican scholars, all of whom cite Costanzo's writings.

The whereabouts of these writings today is unknown, although it is possible that fifteenth-century manuscripts in the Biblioteca Giulio Gabrielli such as the *Promptuarium Theologiae Moralis* or the *Promptuarium Theologiae scolasticae* ('repositories' of moral and scholastic writings), which have not yet been studied or catalogued, may contain fragments of his writings.<sup>92</sup> *The Miracle at Fanjeaux*, depicted in one of the fourteenth-century illuminations from the fragmented antiphonals that come from the convent of San Domenico (**fig. 87**), succinctly conveys the Order of Preachers' belief in the sanctity of Dominican theology and its capacity to spread the true faith. In the illumination, Dominicans and a group of heretics are shown standing on either side of a fire, into which both cast their writings. The volume consumed by flames is that of the heretics, while that which springs from the fire unharmed is the compilation of Dominican writings. Like St. Peter's dominant keys, which assert the recently contested authority of the Papacy,<sup>93</sup> the books held by the Dominican saints in Crivelli's altarpieces can be interpreted as preaching an anti-heretical message.

However, this message was not textually specific. While Crivelli transcribed a passage in Latin from Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans on the open book held by Saint Paul in the cathedral altarpiece (**fig. 14**),<sup>94</sup> in the altarpieces for San Domenico, the open books held by Andrew and Aquinas have crinkled, well-thumbed pages that reveal a lively pseudoscript (**figs. 84, 85**). The letters in red and black ink within margins ruled in pencil closely resemble the format of the fifteenth-century manuscripts that are now in the Biblioteca "Giulio

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list of writings of other fourteenth-century theologians at San Domenico, see Paoletti, "Memorie domenicane," 29-31.

<sup>91</sup> Andrea Rovetta, *Bibliotheca chronologica illustrium virorum provinciae Lombardiae sacri ordinis praedicatorum*, (Bologna: Josephi Longi, 1691), 78-79.

<sup>92</sup> MS. 204, *Promptuarium Theologiae moralis* and MS. 271, *Promptuarium Theologiae Scolasticae*. MS. 175 is a book of sermons on the saints from San Domenico dating to 1479 when Fra Costanzo was prior. It is possible that this was one of the books recorded by Rovetta written by Fra Costanzo, but further research is needed to clarify this.

<sup>93</sup> See below, 93.

<sup>94</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 73.

Gabrielli.” But the pseudoscript suggests that the purpose of the books in Crivelli’s altarpieces was something other than to communicate a specific theological message. Crivelli’s cursive notation gives the impression of an orientalisising language — Greek or Hebrew, rather than Latin. Since Aquinas wrote in Latin, and all of the surviving manuscripts from San Domenico are written in Latin, Crivelli’s books convey an aura of sacred knowledge, just as his Latin signatures (which were occasionally grammatically incorrect) gave his paintings an antique flavour.

During this period there was an ideological hierarchy between the ancient languages according to their closeness to the Word of God. Greek was the language of the gospels, which Jerome translated into Latin, but Hebrew was far older and regarded by some scholars of the period as the true original language, spoken by Adam and Eve in Eden.<sup>95</sup> Surely, then, it would have been more effective had Crivelli used recognisable Hebrew characters or even quoted a passage in that language? Crivelli’s use of pseudoscript does not imply a lack of knowledge of Semitic languages; Mantegna wrote correct Hebrew inscriptions on his paintings and Verrocchio’s work demonstrates a knowledge of Arabic epigraphy.<sup>96</sup> It is, indeed, possible that the Dominicans and perhaps even Crivelli himself had some knowledge of these languages. Nor does pseudoscript indicate an artistic incompetency, for Crivelli’s notation is visually lively, fluent and appealing. Alexander Nagel describes pseudoscript as “a kind of signature, revealing the hand of the artist not only in their manual ductus but also in what could be called their conceptual style.”<sup>97</sup> Crivelli’s virtuoso pseudoscript suggests an awareness of this concept, or at least a degree of self-consciousness about the level of exposure of his hand. As such, the execution of pseudoscript cannot have been a workshop task.

I would suggest that Crivelli’s use of pseudoscript was purposeful, cultivating a remoteness between the viewer and the image, implied by the illegibility of the sacred text. Alexander Nagel has proposed that pseudoscript in Italian painting before 1500 may have been intended to “mark a gap between the fallen present and a sacred past.”<sup>98</sup> Crivelli’s illegible cursive suggests the presence of a veiled meaning that only the figures in the altarpiece are privy to. Aquinas holds his book open for the viewer to see, forcing them to acknowledge their illiteracy of the sacred text. The implication is that the truth will be unveiled to the beholder through dedication to study and transmitting the word of God. Only

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<sup>95</sup> Alexander Nagel, “25 Notes on Pseudoscripts in Italian Art,” *Res* 59/60 (Spring/Autumn 2011): 235.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 230-231.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

then will they become enlightened, like the saints represented, but in comparison to God's omniscience they will always remain to some degree illiterate. As Jonathan Watkins observed of Crivelli's work,

inaccessibility of pictorial space is a powerful analogy for the inaccessibility of the heavenly world it represents. We look through the picture plane as we might look through Saint Paul's glass, "darkly," for a glimpse of heaven. Like the glass, the picture plane is opaque and impenetrable.<sup>99</sup>

Crivelli's heightened artifice, which I shall explore in part two of the thesis, maintains the viewer's awareness of the painting's fiction. His images, unlike naturalistic illusions, offer a commentary on reality that stirs the viewer into a state of internal reflection. Pseudoscript has a significant role to play in making artifice fulfil this function.

### ***Imagines agentes***

The majority of the fifteenth-century manuscripts from San Domenico now in Ascoli's communal library are humble working manuals without illuminations. They include works that many Dominican convents would have possessed, such as the *Dialogues* then believed to be by Gregory the Great,<sup>100</sup> extracts from Antoninus's *Summa Theologica*,<sup>101</sup> Jacobus de Vorigine's sermons,<sup>102</sup> and a life of Saint Catherine of Siena.<sup>103</sup> However, several were of a more precious nature, including the manuscript of *Rhetorica ad Herennium*,<sup>104</sup> then attributed to the Roman politician and orator, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BC), which contains illuminations that I would attribute to Bartolomeo d'Antonio Varnucci (1410-1479), a Florentine artist whose work is found in other manuscripts of Cicero's writings dating to the 1440s.<sup>105</sup> Varnucci's illuminations are characterised by their combination of a blue pigment and gold leaf backing tendrils of foliage in white, which ensnare initials accompanied by *putti* and butterflies (**fig. 89**). *Ad Herennium* was widely read in Dominican *milieu* from the late thirteenth century, after the Dominican scholars Albertus Magnus (c.1200-80) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) commended the art of memory taught by Tullius

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<sup>99</sup> Watkins, "Untricking the Eye," 56.

<sup>100</sup> MS. 12.

<sup>101</sup> MS. 191.

<sup>102</sup> MS. 155.

<sup>103</sup> MS. 41.

<sup>104</sup> MS. 198.

<sup>105</sup> For example, Fol.39V, MS. 249, New College, Oxford. For a reproduction of this illumination, see Jonathan J. G. Alexander, *The Painted Book in Renaissance Italy: 1450-1600* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), fig. 5. On Varnucci, see 12, n. 38.

as the most effective.<sup>106</sup> The manuscript in Ascoli is not described as having come from San Domenico in Giulio Gabrielli's handwritten inventory of 1861, but the revival of interest in the text among Dominicans of this period would suggest this provenance. Tullius taught that memory was associative and could be stimulated by the mental mapping of *loci*, a method that was favoured among Dominicans as a way of memorizing speeches. The use of red ink to highlight rubric or important content in manuscripts, as illustrated by the open books held by Aquinas and Andrew, is an example of this mnemonic tool. The relationship between reading and memory is further suggested by the interpretation of the act of reading in *De modo orandi*, which, according to the Dominican manual, in use during the fifteenth century, signifies recollection.<sup>107</sup>

However, most interesting for the purpose of this study is *Ad Herennium's* recommended use of *imagines agentes*, 'active images,' as a mnemonic technique for preparing to deliver a speech.<sup>108</sup> According to memory writers, both pagan and scholastic, by recalling the images that the speaker had meditated upon during preparation, they could not only perform in a lucid and coherent manner, but could also transmit the emotions embodied by the images studied, thereby stimulating the same emotions in their audience.<sup>109</sup> It is easy to see why *Ad Herennium*, which stressed the effectiveness of images for the memorisation of content, was so popular among the Dominicans, who furnished their churches with rich arrays of imagery and whose mission it was to preach orthodox doctrine, a doctrine which was embodied by the courtly saints represented in their altarpieces. The connection between the mental images used in the *ars memorandi* and actual examples of figurative art is fertile ground for investigation, but has been addressed by few art historians. Citing the *imagines agentes* recommended in *Ad Herennium*, Daniel Arasse suggested that early devotional painting in Italy, such as Duccio's *Maestà* (1311), followed a mnemonic system governed by spatial distortions, unlike the perspectival structure employed by "artistic images."<sup>110</sup> Didi-Huberman posited a connection between memory images and the abstract components of Italian painting of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, relating the fantastical elements of the fourteen allegorical figures in Giotto's Scrovegni Chapel in

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<sup>106</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 193.

<sup>107</sup> Hood, "Saint Dominic's Manners of Praying," App. One (Mode Eight), 205.

<sup>108</sup> Anon, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, MS. 198, f.33; cfr. Anon, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan (London: William Heinemann Ltd.; Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1954), 221.

<sup>109</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 186.

<sup>110</sup> Arasse, "Entre dévotion et culture: Fonctions de l'image religieuse au XVe siècle," in *Faire Croire: Modalités de la diffusion et de la réception des messages religieux di XIIe au XVe siècle*, Collection de L'école Française de Rome 51 (Rome: École française de Rome, 1981), 131-5.

Padua (c. 1305) to the advice in *Ad Herennium* that absurd, striking and colourful images persist longest in the memory.<sup>111</sup> Citing Arasse's work, most recently Jill Bennett has argued that the imagery favoured by fourteenth-century spirituals, the Franciscans in particular, contained emotional prompts to stimulate a personal response in the viewer, operating in a similar way to the *ars memorandi*.<sup>112</sup> However, none of these scholars has examined a specific instance in which a patron, who in all probability had read *Ad Herennium*, may have responded to a work of art they commissioned in light of the function of memory images. Moreover, bearing in mind the Dominicans' preaching activity, the connection between the *ars memorandi* and the images they commissioned is especially pertinent.

The kinds of images that Albertus Magnus and Aquinas recommended as suitable for formulating memory *loci* makes it easy to see why Crivelli's work, and his polyptychs in particular, appealed to the Dominicans of Ascoli.<sup>113</sup> They advised using a "simply patterned" background with a slight suggestion of depth in order gauge the position of the figures in relation to one another, which could be fulfilled by the tooled gold ground, which acts as a foil for the sacred figures, projecting them forwards. A "consistent arrangement" of the figures is also recommended, accomplished by the even division of saints into compartments, allowing them to be read successively. However, it also enables a viewer to take in the group as whole "at a glance" when standing at some distance, another desirable feature, according to Magnus and Aquinas. Specifically, *Ad Herennium* recommends that for backgrounds, "a house, an intercolumnar space, a recess, an arch, or the like" are suitable spaces in which to place images, so that they can be read "in a series."<sup>114</sup> Polyptychs are intercolumnar spaces that frame the images of saints within recessed arches, fulfilling *Ad Herennium's* criteria of the memory "*loci*" in exemplary fashion. The saints' hierarchies and individual identities are "expressed through physical action" as they are shown, for example, in the act of reading or bowing their head before the Virgin. Moreover, the "use of images from a variety of sources" may be fulfilled by the presence of recognizable iconographic elements, as well as Crivelli's bricolages of motifs he assembled from the various centres in which he worked.<sup>115</sup>

The recommended use of "vivid, unusual, or extreme images," described as "*imagines agentes*" in *Ad Herennium*, is particularly interesting, and may help to explain why

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<sup>111</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*, 64.

<sup>112</sup> Bennett, "Stigmata and Sense Memory: St Francis and the Affective Image," *Art History* 24, no. 1 (February 2001): 1-16.

<sup>113</sup> For a summary, see *ibid.*, 179.

<sup>114</sup> Anon, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, MS. 198, f. 31; cfr. trans. Caplan, 209.

<sup>115</sup> On bricolage, see Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 213-16.

the Dominicans — of both Ascoli and Camerino — found Crivelli’s use of relief so appealing, along with gold ornament, vibrant colour, glass gems and the exaggerated gestures of his figures. These visual attributes make Crivelli’s images memorable, even to the visually-stimulated modern-day viewer. Art historians have tended to interpret sculptural relief in terms of its effectiveness during devotional contemplation, which is of course especially true for works intended for private use that could also be touched.<sup>116</sup> However, the idea that relief and corporeal images were also desirable for their capacity to imprint their forms in the mind of the beholder, which could be recalled during preaching or prayer, has been little explored. Bennett has argued that while memory was understood to be primarily visual, it was also conceived as a bodily process that enlisted sense sensations, including touch.<sup>117</sup> Tangible representations, such as Crivelli’s polyptychs with relief inserts, may therefore have been regarded as potentially efficacious memory images by his Tullius-reading patrons.

Turning to the instructions in *Ad Herennium*, we can be even more specific about how Crivelli’s paintings may have fulfilled certain criteria of appropriate memory images. The author states that images which are “solid and sharp” — “*firmae et acres*,” — are “suitable for reawakening recollection,” unlike those which are “weak and feeble” — “*inbecillae et infirmae*.”<sup>118</sup> Crivelli’s pronounced contours, often outlined in black, confer a sharpened aesthetic, and his tempera technique emphasises the hard surface of the picture support, recalling the polished surface of lapidary material.<sup>119</sup> The author of *Ad Herennium* continues to advise that what we remember in reality can be applied to the *ars memorandi*: “[. . .] if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonourable, extraordinary, great, unbelievable, or laughable — *egregie turpe, inhonestum, inusitatum, magnum, incredibile, ridiculum* — we are likely to remember it for a long time.”<sup>120</sup> The author continues,

We ought, then, to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in the memory. And we shall do so if we establish likenesses as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague, but *doing something*, if we assign to them exceptional beauty or singular ugliness; if we dress some of them with crowns or purple cloaks, for example, so that the likeness may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking, or by assigning

<sup>116</sup> See esp. the work of Geraldine A. Johnson: “A taxonomy of touch: tactile encounters in Renaissance Italy,” in *Sculpture and Touch*, ed. Peter Dent (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 91-106; “The Art of Touch in Early Modern Italy,” in *Art and The Senses*, eds. Francesca Bacci and David Melcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 59-84; “Touch, Tactility, and the Reception of Sculpture in Early Modern Italy,” in *A Companion to Art Theory*, eds. Paul Smith and Carolyn Wilde (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2002), 61-74.

<sup>117</sup> Bennet, “Stigmata and Sense Memory,” 5. See also Ch. 4, n. 101.

<sup>118</sup> Anon, *Ad Herennium*, MS. 198, f.33; cfr. trans. Caplan, 219.

<sup>119</sup> On these aspects of Crivelli’s practice, see Ch. Five.

<sup>120</sup> Anon, *Ad Herennium*, MS. 198, f.33; cfr. trans. Caplan, 218.

certain comic effects to our image, for that, too, will ensure our remembering when they are real we likewise remember without difficulty when they are figments, if they have been carefully delineated.”<sup>121</sup>

As Carruthers and others have stressed, the word likeness — “*similitudines*” — in this context does not recommend mimetic representation.<sup>122</sup> A likeness in ancient rhetoric was a something that triggered an association with its referent; it was a sign that could “make something present to the mind by acting on memory.”<sup>123</sup> As such, a likeness was formulated according to the criteria of memory — *mneme* — rather than mimesis.<sup>124</sup> This meant introducing visual tropes that would be suitable for this purpose, even if morally suspect. Striking ugliness or beauty, extravagant regalia, deformity and humour may all have been deemed permissible in theological debate for their mnemonic usefulness.<sup>125</sup> Rather than gratuitous, these features produced images that are *doing something* — “*imagines agentes*,” as they are called in *Ad Herennium*. If these were the criteria for effective memory art in Dominican milieu, who were well-versed with *Ad Herennium*, then it has significant implications for our understanding of the functions of Crivelli’s altarpieces within their convents. Of course, the Franciscans and other brotherhoods of this period also practiced traditional *ars memorandi*, as Carruthers notes, and this may have some bearing on how they used Crivelli’s altarpieces.<sup>126</sup> But the Dominicans were exceptional in their focus on the craft of memory prescribed by *Ad Herennium*, as commended by their forefathers Albertus Magnus and Aquinas. “These two great saints,” Carruthers writes, “exercised their influence for several centuries in ensuring Dominican sponsorship of the Herennian architectural mnemonic.”<sup>127</sup>

Crivelli’s altarpieces, from his lithe Magdalenes and repugnant devils, to his gilt crowns raised in *pastiglia* and swathes of richly-coloured cloths, and his bloodied, decomposing dead Christs — even his saints with winkles and jutting-out bones — possess qualities that were prescribed for memory images by the *Ad Herennium*. However, the recommendation of “certain comic effects” is especially interesting. Carruthers describes devices that “hook up” or “hook in” the mind, triggering the types of associational play required to reflect upon content, or memorise it in preparation for a sermon.<sup>128</sup> She

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, f. 33; cfr. trans. Caplan, 221.

<sup>122</sup> See above, nn. 10-11.

<sup>123</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of memory*, 222.

<sup>124</sup> Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 3-4.

<sup>125</sup> Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 176.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 116.

describes such hooks as “ornament”, whether images or words, the most effective of which embody “surprise or strangeness,” “oxymoron,” and “contrasts”, to name a few.<sup>129</sup> Their purpose is to “hook” the mind into the image by being deliberately playful, arousing an emotional response in the viewer (whether humour, delight, fear, disgust, awe). Once the viewer is hooked, these devices offer “a site for his or her further invention, acting as a marker on the text’s surface or matter that might especially require attention, concentration.”<sup>130</sup> In illuminated manuscripts, the ornaments of marginalia, such as jewels, birds, fruit and flowers, and often rebus-like images, were particularly effective devices, reappearing over the centuries. Their main purpose was not to be iconographic, though they could comment on the content of the main text or image, but to trigger an emotion that would stick in the memory and enable a reflection.

Like the illuminated drolleries that sit at the edge of a text, the cucumbers, flies, cracks, books, signatures, crowns and fruits of Crivelli’s paintings are mostly rendered distinct from the main object of attention — the sacred figure — whether by being placed at a threshold, by being rendered in a different media like *pastiglia* or by being of a different scale. That is not to deny them the iconographic meanings and illusionistic functions that art historians have attributed to them in the past. But in every case, these devices offer a “hook” into the image that enables a reflection upon the main object of attention. And they perfectly fulfil the requirement of provoking the humour, shock, surprise that Tullius prescribes for memory activation. So successful are they, that even today Crivelli’s cucumbers fascinate the viewer, his flies surprise us and his *pastiglia* ornaments make us look twice, as they are incongruous next to the painted representations of the holy figures. In this sense, Crivelli’s paintings are truly “*imagines agentes*” — they are active and gesture towards the viewer in various ways, summoning them to contemplate the sacred. As interfaces, they offer up various entryways: a cucumber positioned at the threshold of real and painted space (**fig. 2**); tangible, three-dimensional keys, promising to unlock the gates of paradise (**figs. 27, 28**); anthropomorphic friezes, staffs and armour, with faces that look either at the holy personages or at a space beyond the visual object (**figs. 120, 182**).

Anna Degler’s compelling arguments that Crivelli’s devices should be understood as *parerga* — peripheral elements that adorn an image, complementing and often interpreting it — must be borne in mind here.<sup>131</sup> *Parerga* were discussed by Pliny in the *Natural History*, a work that painters in Squarcione’s circle seem to have been aware of and which Crivelli

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<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>131</sup> Degler, *Parergon*. On *parerga* as conceived in antiquity, see Platt, “Of sponges and stones,” 241-78.

makes reference to in his employment of details such as the fictive fly.<sup>132</sup> It is certainly possible that Crivelli himself conceived his marginalia as *parerga*, particularly bearing in mind the intellectual milieu in which he trained. However, I would suggest that his Marchigian viewers were probably not aware of this ancient theory, which Degler presents as an overarching phenomenon of fifteenth-century Italian painting. While the devices may have been conceived as *parerga* by Crivelli himself, what would have counted for Crivelli's mendicant patrons was that they activated representations of the sacred subject and enabled the viewer to become a participant. If we must propose written sources that may have guided the Dominicans' viewing practices, I would highlight the *Ad Herennium* and commentaries on it by Dominican scholars as more likely than the works of ancient authors who discussed the *parergon*, even though the concepts presented by both function in similar ways.

For both artist and viewer, then, the image was like a membrane, which the mind was invited to pass through. On the other hand, relief ornaments and inverse perspective create an impasse between the devotee's spiritual journey and the sacred beyond. There is an intriguing tension between these projecting forces and the multiple cracks and openings that threaten to break down the composition, hinting at a truth beyond its fiction.<sup>133</sup> Though not in the altarpieces for San Domenico, we often find cracks that fracture the parapets that the holy figures stand upon, which read simultaneously as the surface of the painting (**fig. 1**). Christ's very wounds puncture the surface of his body, the object of devotion (**fig. 72**). As Adrian Randolph so memorably noted, the *Annunciation with Saint Emidius* is literally *crivellato* — riddled with multiple openings, both architectural and conceptual (**fig. 2**).<sup>134</sup> The *crivello*, Italian for sieve, is of course the rebus of Crivelli's name, which formed part of his crest comprising an eagle surmounting a sieve, described on the signet ring that was listed in the postmortem inventory of his belongings.<sup>135</sup> The sieve, which Crivelli placed on the shelf in the Virgin's house in the *Annunciation*, was a symbol of innocence after the Vestal virgin Tuccia carried water in a sieve to prove her chastity, as described by Pliny (**fig. 63**).<sup>136</sup> Crivelli may have enjoyed the posing of a subtle analogy between his membrane-paintings, which

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<sup>132</sup> Degler, *Parergon*, 71-81; Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 181-5.

<sup>133</sup> These have a similar function to the crumbling wall in Crivelli's earliest painting, the Verona *Virgin and Child* (**fig. 10**), which Stephen Campbell suggested signals "the revelation of a mystery, of the divine nature of Christ, the immanence of a 'real' beyond the merely painted [ . . . ]." Campbell, "On the Importance of Crivelli," in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, 148.

<sup>134</sup> Adrian W.B. Randolph, *Touching Objects: Intimate Experiences of Italian Fifteenth-Century Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 73.

<sup>135</sup> Coltinari, "Regesto," 200, doc. 184.

<sup>136</sup> Stefano Papetti, "I dipinti di Carlo Crivelli," 280-2.

the viewer's mind, in search of truth, may or may not have penetrated, and Tuccia's sieve, whose permeability would determine her virtue.

Bennett has analysed the wounds of Christ pictured in late-medieval images in terms of Roland Barthes's discussion of the *punctum*, the "sting, speck, cut, little hole" in a photograph which triggers an emotional response in the viewer.<sup>137</sup> Bennett demonstrates how representations of Christ's wounds function in a similar way, since they were conceived figuratively as doors through which the viewer could enter in order to be spiritually transformed.<sup>138</sup> This process is comparable to the one that is at play in Crivelli's paintings, though there also seems to be a resisting force in his use of various forms of projection. Like Bennett's analysis of the spatial relationships that enliven certain fourteenth-century paintings, however, there is a sense of the image as a permeable structure that was receptive to the viewer's participation.

Crivelli's images are sites that the viewer's mind can access in order to meditate upon the sacred subject. Their function as sites for meditation is illuminated by medieval pedagogical theory, in which learning began with study, was developed during meditation, and resulted in the creation of memory. The twelfth-century Saxon theologian, Hugh of St. Victor, explained that unlike study, *lectio*, meditation "delights to range along open ground, where it fixes its free gaze upon the contemplation of truth, drawing together now these, now those ideas, or now penetrating into profundities [ . . . ]."<sup>139</sup> Carruthers suggests that the most effective image-sites for meditation were those that allowed the viewer to compose something themselves — "to stay and ponder, to fill in missing connections, to add to the material they present."<sup>140</sup> While a friar might begin their study, then, by reading a book, Crivelli's altarpieces may have offered sites for meditation that allowed them to ponder at length and develop the content of their study.

The very structure of the polyptych invites the viewer to move at their will, making, or composing connections as they go, perhaps between Francis and the Dead Christ, Dominic and the Virgin, the sculpted child's head in the frieze that turns to look at the sleeping Christ Child, or perhaps between the embroidered panels of saints on Saint Peter's orphrey and Saint Peter himself, between the figures that enter Aquinas's church and they themselves who stand within the Church of San Domenico. We are reminded of Pietro Bembo's letter of 1506 to Isabella d'Este, in which he explained that Giovanni Bellini liked to "wander at will in

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<sup>137</sup> Bennett, "Stigmata and Sense Memory," 11-12.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Quoted in Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 193.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

his paintings so that they will satisfy both himself and the viewer.”<sup>141</sup> Like Bellini, Crivelli invites the viewer to become an artist, as they identify connections, patterns and forms that replicate across media and matter.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, the antinaturalistic register that Crivelli employed requires the viewer to re-make, or complete, the image. The contrasting registers of gold and paint, flatness and relief, pictorial scale and real scale, disrupt visual homogeneity and leave a space for the viewer’s interpretation.<sup>143</sup> In his study on play as a phenomenon of culture, Johan Huizinga describes the human instinct to reinvent and embellish life with playful scenarios, which enable them to make sense of the world in a temporary realm, removed from reality.<sup>144</sup> The scholar identifies freedom as a condition of play. Crivelli’s paintings, with their multiple entrypoints and possible meanings, fulfil this requirement of play as a voluntary activity.

As Crivelli’s paintings increasingly come to look like active images, *imagines agentes*, which gesture towards the viewer in various ways, it is worth returning to certain iconographic elements that have interested art historians in the past; for example, Saint Peter’s keys (**figs. 27, 28, 37, 47**) According to Ronald Lightbown, whose argument was supported by Alison Wright recently, the three-dimensional emphasis of the keys in Crivelli’s Dominican altarpieces was “at the request of the friars in order to assert the exclusive authority of the Church and of the Popes of Rome, Vicars of Christ, as successors of Peter” in the face of threats from the dissident sect of Spiritual Franciscans known as the Fraticelli, who argued that the papacy had fallen into heresy.<sup>145</sup> While this interpretation sheds light on the Dominicans’ ideological agenda and the ways in which Crivelli’s distinct use of ornament may have helped to promote it, it neglects to consider how the sculpturally prominent keys may have functioned during moments of meditation. Anna Degler argues that Saint Peter’s keys “play on the semantics of opening and closing.”<sup>146</sup> She has suggested that the keys, which exist physically in the viewer’s space, provide access to the image. Equally, she observes that they could act as a barrier to the illusion. Degler’s compelling analysis, which

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<sup>141</sup> Pietro Bembo, *Lettere*, ed. Ernesto Travi, vol. 1 (Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1987), 209, no. 225.

<sup>142</sup> On these connections, see Ch. Six.

<sup>143</sup> Several authors comment upon Crivelli’s paintings as soliciting the involvement of the viewer for completion: Watkins, “Untricking the Eye,” 48-58; Campbell, “Grace in the Making,” 38-55. For an analysis of Trecento paintings functioning in this way, see Krüger, “Medium and Imagination,” 57-81. See also Chs. Four and Five.

<sup>144</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens. A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1949; repr., London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 1-27. I want to thank Susannah Rutherglen for bringing the rich connections between Crivelli’s work and Huizinga’s text to my attention.

<sup>145</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 214; Wright, “Crivelli’s Divine Materials,” 58-60.

<sup>146</sup> Degler, *Parergon*, 159-161.

interprets the keys from a 'parergonal' standpoint, is strengthened in the light of the evidence put forth in this chapter regarding Dominican devotion. Like the marginalia of a manuscript, which offer a "hook" into the text, the sculpted keys maintain some separation from the main objects of focus – the sacred figures, who are painted — but, as entities that exist in real space, they also provide a physical entryway to the image from where the viewer can begin their contemplation. Crivelli's keys, and his altarpieces at large, are effective *imagines agentes*, offering to connect earth and paradise.

So successful were the keys as devices, it appears that the painting which replaced Crivelli's altarpiece on the high altar when the church was renovated in the eighteenth century — Simone De Magistris's *Madonna of the Rosary* (1592; **fig. 89**) — sought to draw upon their efficacy, long after the Fraticelli had ceased to be a threat. De Magistris painted a vast set of keys crossed over in the lower foreground of the painting, a feature that is not common in other representations of the subject. Placed closest to the viewer's eye-line, they also bear the artist's signature and are thus on the threshold of the representation, providing an access point via the artist to the sacred figures above.

## Conclusion

I began this chapter by examining the origins of the commission of Crivelli's polyptychs for the church of San Domenico in Ascoli Piceno. We saw that Crivelli's patron, Fra Costanzo da Fabriano, learnt the devotional value of painting having lived with Fra Angelico's art during his time at San Marco in Florence. After admiring Crivelli's polyptych on the high altar of Ascoli's Cathedral, he asked the Venetian artist to create a high altarpiece for the small church of his newly-renovated convent, which soon led to the commission of another smaller altarpiece for a private chapel. I put forward a hypothesis for the original configurations of these now fragmented altarpieces. I then examined the relationship between the friars' religious activities and Crivelli's paintings. We saw that through physical deprivation, they cultivated empathy with Christ's suffering, bringing this to bear on their consumption of the Dead Christ depicted in the high altarpiece. I suggested that the intensely emotional states of the saints involved in the Lamentation, as well as the devotional gestures of the saints in the main niches, could trigger similarly impassioned responses in the viewer, blurring the boundaries between art and life.

I then turned to the scholarly activities of the preaching friars and their famous library. I suggested that Crivelli's depictions of books in the altarpieces reflect the convent's

history and the Order's identity as a whole, in which study played a fundamental role. I proposed that the lively, virtuoso pseudoscript that the open books exhibit cultivates a feeling of remoteness between the viewer and the image, implied by the illegibility of the sacred text. Crivelli's illegible cursive suggests the presence of a veiled meaning that only the figures in the altarpiece are privy to. Finally, I examined the contents of one of the library's surviving manuscripts, *Ad Herennium*, in light of the friars' engagement with Crivelli's altarpieces. *Ad Herennium's* instructions on the art of memory and the appropriate images that support the memorisation of speeches suggest that Crivelli's idiosyncratic style may have been especially appreciated by the friars. Moreover, devices such as the cucumber, which compare to the surprising textual or visual ornaments described by Carruthers that "hook" the mind into a subject of interest, proffer an invitation to the viewer to enter the image and begin their personal contemplation.

The paradox of the mendicants' possession of often sumptuous works of art is a topic that has interested several art historians.<sup>147</sup> In Crivelli studies, Thomas Golsenne proposed that the rich attire of female saints was acceptable because they were figured as divine spouses of God, while Alison Wright suggested that Crivelli's pictorial skills redirect the value of the materials represented to one that is purely artistic.<sup>148</sup> However, the arguments I have put forth in this chapter suggest that visual riches may also have been ethically acceptable for their devotional efficacy. Crivelli's intensely expressive figures, his vivid aesthetic and incorporation of eye-catching marginalia are both memorable and stimulating. Fra Costanzo, who learnt the spiritual potential of suggestive and alluring images from Fra Angelico at San Marco, must have appreciated Crivelli's *imagines agentes*. Studying texts could educate a friar for the purpose of preaching, but the capacity of Crivelli's paintings to solicit the psychological involvement of the beholder — whether friar or lay person — would have given the altarpieces a unique role within the church of San Domenico. With his intellectual and spiritual ambitions, Fra Costanzo must have been well aware of the power that Crivelli's altarpieces could exert over his audiences.

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<sup>147</sup> Cannon, *Religious Poverty*; Donal Cooper and Janet Robson, "A great sumptuousness of paintings": Frescoes and Franciscan poverty at Assisi in 1288 and 1312," *The Burlington Magazine* 151 (2009): 656-62; Michael Cole, "Arti povere, 1300-1650," in Anderson Dunlop and Smith, *The Matter of Art*, 240-262.

<sup>148</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 58-9; Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 76.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Enchanting Materials and Techniques**

In his classic 1992 essay, “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology,” Alfred Gell claimed that the viewer’s recognition of the complex technical processes involved in art making are what give art its power. “The value of works of art,” he argued, “is conditioned by the fact that it is difficult to get from the materials of which they are composed to the finished product.”<sup>1</sup> The artist, whom Gell described as an “occult technician” endowed with supreme knowledge and skill in their craft, produces objects that “cast a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form.”<sup>2</sup> Gell lamented the then-dominant iconographic and socio-historical approaches in art history, which he thought denied the physical reality of the art object and its distinguishing feature of technical excellence. Our society’s cultic appreciation of art’s immaterial aura (as he saw it), paired with a discomfort with craftsmanship and its association with labour, meant that we were ill-equipped to understand the social consequences of art’s technical excellence. As Gell’s title suggests, he proposed a relationship between “the technical processes involved in the creation of a work of art and the production of social relations via art.”<sup>3</sup> Art, he proposed, is part of a category of other technologies of enchantment with which it interacts. As an example, he described the poetic spells of the Trobriand people of New Guinea, sung to make their gardens bear fruit.<sup>4</sup> The efficacy of their poems is bound up with the description of ideal gardening tools, which encourage the garden to grow. Gell identified a correlation in the productivity of one technology of enchantment (gardening) and another (the poetic ritual).

The anthropologist’s arguments shed light on the function of Crivelli’s paintings as technically sophisticated visual objects. The made nature of his art is, I would argue, central to its meaning. Together with overt artifice, which will be explored in Part Two, the technical scope of Crivelli’s works, encompassing almost every option available to traditional panel painters, emphasises facture, in turn conditioning the viewer’s response. Crivelli employed multiple gilding techniques, embellishing them with both tooling and relief, as well as various possibilities for applied ornament, all combined often within single works. Each technique is

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<sup>1</sup> Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology,” in *Anthropology, Art and Aesthetics*, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 54.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-1.

mastered and pursued to its absolute limits, leaving the viewer in a state of ambivalence as they wonder at how the effects were achieved. We are yet to understand, for example, how Crivelli simulated variegated marble: conservators at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. determined that both egg and oil were present on the parapet of the *Madonna and Child with a Donor* in their collection (**fig. 90**), but whether they were mixed or applied in discrete layers, and how pigments were made to diffuse imperceptibly from one to the next, was unclear.<sup>5</sup>

My contention is that Crivelli's virtuoso skills would have been particularly appreciated by the Dominicans, who, as we learned in Chapter Two, possessed several of his polyptychs. The friars practised the art of memory, which can be understood as a technical process requiring knowledge, dedication and practice. Mary Carruthers aptly describes how, in monastic tradition, thought was considered as an imaginative craft. She writes,

the goal of rhetorical mnemotechnical craft was [. . .] to give an orator the means and wherewithal to invent his material, both beforehand and — crucially — on the spot. *Memoria* is most usefully thought of as a compositional art.<sup>6</sup>

If Gell's theories are accepted, we may, then, identify a parallel process between Crivelli's technology of enchantment and that of the friars. Both aimed at similar goals — to bring their audiences closer to God — and both arguably utilised similar approaches. If the friars were composing content in their sermons by drawing upon their storehouse of memories, Crivelli was also combining motifs and styles collected over his itinerant career, and executing his images by harnessing his knowledge of how to manipulate materials, acquired through years of dedicated study. In his study of the aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas, Umberto Eco wrote that Thomists conceived of art as “a science, which produced objects endowed with their own laws [. . .]. Art was not an expression, but a construction, an operation aiming at a certain result.”<sup>7</sup> Crivelli's Dominican patrons may, therefore, have regarded the exemplary facture of his art as one of its most efficacious features. It conditioned their own craft of thought, and its enchantment assisted the viewer to contemplate the mysterious sacred subject.

Chapter Two examined the Dominican's technology of enchantment; here, I wish to explore Crivelli's. Scholarship has not yet paid sufficient attention to the interrelationship

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<sup>5</sup> Suzanne Quillen Lomax, “Analysis Report”, National Gallery of Art Scientific Research Department (3 December 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas* (London: Radius, 1998), 164.

between making and meaning in Crivelli's art, perhaps owing to the difficulty of reconciling technical evidence with art-historical interpretation. Scholars often comment on the brilliance of Crivelli's egg tempera technique, but such ideas are never pursued beyond the remarks about the crisp realism of elements in *trompe-l'oeil*, or the textured and colouristic depiction of textiles. Although scholars such as Jean Campbell and Alison Wright are now interested in the meanings of Crivelli's materials and their effects, the many technical studies that have been carried out on Crivelli's paintings have been neglected by art historians.<sup>8</sup> Since I began my research in 2015, numerous museums have examined his work in studio conditions, carrying out scientific analysis to achieve a better understanding of what Campbell calls Crivelli's "Techniques of Devotion," and what are for Wright his "Divine Materials."<sup>9</sup> Within the past twenty years, almost all of Crivelli's works housed in museums have been the subject of some form of technical analysis. Although not all the results of these analyses are published, those that are represent a largely untapped source of information on Crivelli's practice by art historians.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter examines Crivelli's techniques, from the preparation of his panels to the final glazes, with a focus on the altarpieces for the Church of San Domenico in Ascoli. As well as presenting a synthesis of the current state of knowledge about Crivelli's technique, resulting in more nuanced conclusions than have hitherto been drawn, this chapter sheds

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<sup>8</sup> Campbell, "Grace in the Making," 39-55; Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 57-77. Campbell is unique in referencing the study of Crivelli's underdrawings by restorers at the Brera (Sara Micheli and Mattia Patti, "Pittura in costruzione. L'Underdrawing nelle opere di Carlo Crivelli," Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 246-52) on p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> Recent published studies include: Fabio Piacentini, "Il restauro della Pietà di Carlo Crivelli: considerazioni e note tecniche," *Musei Vaticani: Bollettino* (2017): 341-360; Gianfranco Pocobene, "Carlo Crivelli's *St George Slaying the Dragon*: Materiality, Factice and Restoration," in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, 132-144.

<sup>10</sup> Hendrick W. van Os, *The Early Venetian Paintings in Holland*, trans. Michael Hoyle (Florence: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1978); Jill Dunkerton and Raymond White, "The Discovery and Identification of an Original Varnish on a Panel by Carlo Crivelli," *The National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 21 (2000): 70-6; Jill Dunkerton, "Carlo Crivelli. The Dead Christ supported by Two Angels," in *Underdrawings in Renaissance Painting, Art in the Making*, ed. David Bomford (London: The National Gallery, 2002), exhibition catalogue, 94-101; Emanuela Daffra, "Trittico di San Domenico," in *Restituzioni 2008. Tesori d'arte restaurati; quattordicesima edizione*, ed. Carlo Bertelli (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), exhibition catalogue, Gallerie di Palazzo Leoni Montanari, Vicenza, 292-301; Ciro Castelli, "Osservazioni sulle carpenterie," in Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 241-5; Micheli and Patti, "Pittura in costruzione"; Simone Settembri, "Appunti sulle tecniche di Vittore e Carlo Crivelli," in Coltrinari and Delpriori, *Vittore Crivelli*, 87-94; Ettore Napione and Sara Rodella, "La *Madonna della Passione* di Carlo Crivelli: il restauro del 2011 e qualche considerazione," *Verona Illustrata* 25 (2012): 5-20; Delfina Fagnani et al., "Il restauro di un dipinto di Carlo Crivelli della Accademia Carrara: Metodo e prassi dalla vicenda conservativa alle indagini scientifiche, fino al recupero della policromia e del manto dorato a rilievo," in *Lo Stato dell'Arte* 12. 23/24 October, 2014, *Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera, Milan. Volume degli Atti*, ed. Daniela Rullo (Turin: Gruppo Italiano dell'International Institute for Conservation, 2014), 221-9.

light on the materials and techniques of Crivelli's mixed-media idiom reserved for polyptychs, which have previously received little critical attention from both conservators and art historians. This chapter also formulates some new hypotheses on the operations of Crivelli's workshop, and the ways in which control oscillated between the conditions of a commission and Crivelli's own creative decisions. What emerges is a picture of a highly organised and systematic artist, whose rigorous methods produced an artistic product characterised by an unusually tight melding together of all of the different layers and elements of the object. The latter means not only that many of Crivelli's paintings are in excellent condition, but also that they have a finely wrought, crystalline appearance that is in part responsible for their metaphysical atmosphere.

The content is informed by technical examinations carried out in July 2017 by conservators and scientists at the National Gallery, London, on panels belonging to the larger Dominican altarpiece in the collection: *The Virgin and Child (fig. 78)* with *Saint John the Baptist (fig. 82)*, *Saint Peter (fig. 47)*, *Saint Catherine (fig. 32)* *Saint Dominic (fig. 80)*, *Saint Francis (fig. 81)*, *Saint Andrew (84)*, *Saint Stephen (fig. 91)* and *Saint Thomas Aquinas (fig. 68)*.<sup>11</sup> Infrared reflectography (IRR), during which the upper layers of the painting are penetrated with rays on the infrared spectrum to reveal carbon-based pigments, was used to examine Crivelli's underdrawings. X-radiography, when X-rays penetrate the whole panel, revealed the preparation layers. X-ray fluorescence (XRF), which is used to identify the elements of a material, was carried out on the 'gems' and gold leaf. Reflectance transformation imaging (RTI), during which a panel is photographed in raking light from different angles to form a single image of its surface textures, enabled Crivelli's use of relief to be studied in greater detail. The opportunity to examine the panels with conservators at close quarters and in studio conditions enabled a deeper understanding of their physical nature, ornamental effects and pictorial idiom. In particular, it allowed for a careful inspection of the relief elements and their interaction with painted areas, which was revealed to be far more nuanced than had been previously appreciated. As well as incorporating material evidence from the altarpieces themselves, this chapter is also informed by the findings from the past technical studies referred to above.

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<sup>11</sup> The analysis was carried out by Marika Spring, Rachel Billinge, Helen Howard, Xavier Aure and Britta New, coordinated and assisted by Caroline Campbell and Jill Dunkerton. I want to thank everyone involved, particularly Marika, Rachel, Britta and Helen for helping me to understand the results.

## Carpentry

The paucity of documentation concerning Crivelli's practice, as well as the absence of all but one preparatory drawing, have discouraged scholars from addressing the issue of his workshop and its operations. However, surviving contracts for his work, the fact of his itinerancy and the presence of multiple hands at work in his altarpieces offer evidence on the ways in which Crivelli organised his artistic production. The extent to which Crivelli gave the artisans whose assistance he depended upon autonomy in their work sheds light on his intentions, while the conditions of a commission, often determined by a patron's requests, also impacted upon Crivelli's working practice. Although Ascoli was Crivelli's home, he relocated to Camerino between 1483 and 1485 and Fabriano between 1490 and 1494 whilst working on commissions for those cities and their environs. The contract for *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter* (**fig. 21**), drawn up in November 1483 in the presence of the rectors of the Church of San Pietro di Muralto in Camerino, states that the painter will receive a house "where he can stay with his family for two years."<sup>12</sup> Similarly, in the contract for the *Coronation of the Virgin* (**fig. 92**), drawn up in January 1490 in the presence of the two rectors from the church of San Francesco in Fabriano, and the guardian and theology professor, Crivelli is promised a house along with *grano e vino* for two years.<sup>13</sup>

It is likely that Crivelli employed a team of local craftsmen for the preparation of his frames and panels, as well as for general workshop assistance, rather than shifting a fleet of *garzoni* and woodworkers with him from Ascoli. Altarpieces executed in Ascoli by Crivelli's self-proclaimed "disciple," Pietro Alemanno, and presumably by Crivelli's workshop during the 1480s, suggest that they were left responsible for satisfying the demand for his paintings while he was working in Camerino.<sup>14</sup> The acts relating to the execution of *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter* are witnessed by the woodcarver, Lucantonio Barberetti of Camerino, who probably carved Crivelli's frames and panels whilst working on commissions in the central-Marchigian town.<sup>15</sup> Matteo Mazzalupi has convincingly proposed that Barberetti can be identified as the Master of the Madonna of Macereto, a sculptor of naturalistic

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<sup>12</sup> Coltrinari, "Regesto Documentario," 195, doc. 101.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 197, doc. 133.

<sup>14</sup> The early 1480s was when Alemanno began working as an independent artist in Ascoli. Papetti and Di Provido, *Pietro Alemanno*, 20-23, 114. See also Ch. Three, 122.

<sup>15</sup> Coltrinari, "Regesto Documentario," 197, doc. 125.

Madonnas, Crucified Christs and saints in the Camerino region,<sup>16</sup> a suggestion that leads us to wonder whether Crivelli, like his brother and his Venetian teachers, on occasion incorporated figurative sculpture into the frames of his altarpieces.<sup>17</sup> The notary acts relating to Crivelli's personal and professional activities are often witnessed by the craftsmen with whom he collaborated, offering precious testimony of his artistic networks.<sup>18</sup> It is noteworthy that while the craftsmen assisting Crivelli's projects changed depending on his location, there is little variation in the way in which his panels were prepared, suggesting he had a fail-safe method that he instructed workshop members to implement. The possible reasons why such a method was necessary are considered below.

What Crivelli had less control over was the carpentry. The contract for *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter* reveals that he was instructed to paint a framed panel that was already positioned on the high altar of San Pietro in Camerino, to which a woodcarver, presumably Barberetti, would make "additions" following a drawing approved by the patrons and possibly provided by Crivelli.<sup>19</sup> *The Coronation of the Virgin*, completed by 1494 for the Church of San Francesco in Fabriano, was also painted on a pre-existing framed panel dating back to 1474. The guardians of the convent had to accumulate sufficient funds before an artist could be commissioned to paint it.<sup>20</sup> Commissioning painters to work on pre-existing carpentry seems to have occurred often in the Marche: for example, in 1481 Vittore Crivelli was commissioned to paint a now-lost polyptych for the church of San Francesco in Loro Piceno, the carpentry for which had already been executed by Giovanni di Stefano da Montelparo, while in the same year, the friars of San Francesco in San Severino requested financial assistance from the commune to pay for the painting of a polyptych whose frame had been carved by Domenico Indivini some years earlier.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Matteo Mazzalupi, "Maestri di legname a Camerino tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento. Inizi di un'indagine d'archivio," in *Rinascimento Scolpito. Maestri di legno tra Marche e Umbria*, ed. Raffaele Casciaro (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2006), 97-103.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, the *San Severino Altarpiece* by Vittore Crivelli and the sculptor Domenico Indivini for the church of S. Maria delle Grazie (Pinacoteca Comunale di San Severino), as well as the Polyptych by Antonio Vivarini and Indivini for the Confraternity of Sant'Antonio, Pesaro (Pinacoteca Vaticana): Francesca Coltrinari, "Domenico Indivini e Sebastiano d'Appennino: Una bottega di scultura e intarsio ligneo nelle Marche del Rinascimento," in *Rinascimento Scolpito. Maestri del Legno fra Umbria e Marche*, ed. Raffaele Casciaro (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2005), exhibition catalogue, Convento di San Domenico, Camerino, 41-71, figs. 1, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Daffra, "Incantesimi agli occhi," 20-1.

<sup>19</sup> Coltrinari, "Regesto Documentario," 195, doc. 101.

<sup>20</sup> Emanuela Daffra, "Incoronazione della Vergine con la Trinità...," in Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 230.

<sup>21</sup> Coltrinari, "Regesto Documentario," 194-5, docs. 89, 91; Delpriori, "Di pittura e di intaglio: la cultura lignea nella Marche e la civiltà del polittico," in *Il Quattrocento a Fermo: Tradizione e avanguardie da Niccola di Ulisse da Siena a Carlo Crivelli*, eds. Alessandro Marchi and Giulio Spina, (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2018), 72.

Such examples are salutary reminders that the woodwork of a large and complicated polyptych could match, or even surpass, the cost of having it painted. It also reminds us that the frame was understood as an integral feature of the altarpiece that elevated the figures represented, a fact that was lost on the eighteenth and nineteenth-century vendors and buyers who destroyed almost all of the original frames belonging to Crivelli's paintings. The misconception that paintings in the fifteenth century were the products of a single master has now been corrected. However, the extent to which altarpieces were three-dimensional objects that involved close collaboration between carpenter, woodcarver and painter, with the latter often having to adapt their design to a pre-existing structure, as well as members of the workshop specialising in certain tasks, such as gilding or predella painting, is not yet fully understood. And this situation seems to have been particularly the case with polyptychs in the Marche, which, during the latter half of the Quattrocento, were large, complex and highly elaborate structures (**fig. 44**). As Andrea De Marchi has observed of Marchigian polyptychs, "just as these structures were about to become obsolete [in other parts of Italy], there was an explosion of Autumn colour."<sup>22</sup> Even *pale*, often thought of as more simple structures than polyptychs could, when accompanied by a lunette, a predella and additional panels with figures inserted in the frames, become complicated, multi-panelled altarpieces. An example is the original configuration of Crivelli's *Coronation of the Virgin* (**fig. 92**). Crivelli's *pale* are hardly single-field altarpieces, but maintain the multiple viewpoints of his elaborate polyptychs.<sup>23</sup>

In the contract for the polyptych for Camerino Cathedral (c.1488-90), the chaplain charged Crivelli with overseeing the painting of the altarpiece, but the woodwork — comprising both frame and panels — would be paid for and carved "*a cura sua o di un suo delegato*."<sup>24</sup> Whether Crivelli had a say in the design cannot be known, but the fact that the assemblage of this altarpiece's carpentry was found to be superior to that of the San Domenico triptych for the same city (**fig. 20**) suggests that Crivelli often had to make do with what was provided by the patron.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, having examined Crivelli's panels in the Pinacoteca di Brera, Ciro Castelli concluded that "the divergences between the supports [. . .] indicate the presence of different workshops, with lesser or greater technical ability."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> De Marchi, *La pala d'altare*, 159.

<sup>23</sup> Golsenne has observed that the superimposed surfaces and layers of Crivelli's art increase in *pala quadre*. Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 191-3.

<sup>24</sup> "[. . .] by himself or one of his delegates." Coltrinari, "Regesto documentario," 197, doc. 124.

<sup>25</sup> Ciro Castelli, "Osservazioni sulle Carpenterie," in Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 244.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

In other instances, the typology of an altarpiece was determined by a pre-existing model. Scholars agree that the triptych format, with predella and pinnacles, of Crivelli's 1482 altarpiece for the Dominicans of Camerino (**fig. 20**) was probably modelled on the altarpiece of 1480 by Niccolò di Liberatore called *Alunno*, now in the Pinacoteca Vaticana (**fig. 93**),<sup>27</sup> while Christa Gardner von Teuffel suggested that the subject of *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter* and its single-field structure (**fig. 21**) may be based on Giovanni di Corraduccio's altarpiece now in the Pinacoteca Comunale of Macerata, which also derives from Camerino, if not the same church.<sup>28</sup> The frontal and hieratic *Madonna della Candeletta* (**fig. 94**), with her narrow verticality, is probably based on the *Madonna di Santa Maria in Via* (**fig. 95**), a local prestigious icon of the late thirteenth century, which is still displayed in the apse of Santa Maria in Via, Camerino.<sup>29</sup>

On occasion the surviving contracts reveal Crivelli's patrons providing specific instructions on both subject matter and its arrangement.<sup>30</sup> In the contract for the *Coronation of the Virgin*, Crivelli was asked to paint two figures each side of Christ and the Virgin (in the end he painted three) and, in the predella, the apostles or the story of a saint to be chosen by the friars; the lunette had to depict the *Pietà* with the Madonna and Saint John but could be designed in any way he wished (**fig. 92**).<sup>31</sup> The 1491 contract for *The Madonna della Rondine*, commissioned by the guardian and rectors of the convent of San Francesco in Matelica (**fig. 96**), stipulates that Crivelli should paint, in the main field, the Virgin Mary with her son in her arms, and two full-sized saints on each side of them.<sup>32</sup>

Such instances lead us to wonder about the extent of Crivelli's agency when faced with the requests of his patrons. The fact that they often started by arranging the woodwork points to the practical way in which Crivelli's patrons approached commissioning an altarpiece, which did not necessarily privilege the painter's creativity. However, in Crivelli's only intact polyptych in Ascoli's cathedral, the frame interacts sensitively with the painted panels (**fig. 14**). As Giuseppe Clerici has shown, the architecture of the frame has distinctly

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<sup>27</sup> Emanuela Daffra, "Carlo Crivelli a Camerino," in *Pittori a Camerino nel Quattrocento*, ed. Andrea De Marchi (Milan: Federico Motta Editore, 2002), 423; Stephen J. Campbell, "Panels from the Altarpiece for S. Domenico, Camerino, 1482," in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, 183.

<sup>28</sup> Christa Gardner von Teuffel, "Carlo Crivelli e l'introduzione della pala d'altare rinascimentale nelle Marche," in Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 99, fig. 6.

<sup>29</sup> Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli*, 291; Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 425-26; C. Jean Campbell, "Grace in the Making," 51-52.

<sup>30</sup> This was common practice. See Charles Hope, "Altarpieces and the Requirements of Patrons," in *Christianity and the Renaissance. Image and the Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, eds. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 535-571.

<sup>31</sup> Coltrinari, "Regesto," doc. 133, 197.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, doc. 139, 198.

Venetian features, particularly the *cimasa* with five perforated lunettes surmounted by ogee arches, with a larger one at the centre, mirroring the design of the façade of San Marco.<sup>33</sup> In Venetian frame design, the appropriation of this motif from San Marco's façade had been frequent in altarpieces since the fourteenth century — an example being Paolo Veneziano's Saint Lucy Polyptych, now in the Accademia. The analogy implied, I would suggest, that like the precious jewels, relics and images housed in San Marco, so too were the painted representations of saints contained within sacred architecture. While some scholars have suggested the Venetian design may suggest Crivelli's intervention, similar frames that cite San Marco's façade had been present in the Marche since the fourteenth century in the polyptychs by Paolo Veneziano and his sons, and — offering a direct precedent to the typology of Crivelli's cathedral polyptych — the altarpieces of the Vivarini brothers.

Although we cannot verify whether Crivelli was occasionally involved in designing his frames, the traditional argument that he updated his practice by departing from the polyptych format in favour of the *pala quadra* can be disregarded.<sup>34</sup> Such an assumption subscribes to the modern tendency to seek a teleological progression in artistic practice, when in fact art production is by no means linear and must adapt to the particular conditions of each commission, as the evidence I have presented above demonstrates. Moreover, by subscribing to such a view, we once again fall prey to judging Crivelli's work against Albertian criteria, which see naturalistic space as the ultimate goal of painting, when such a goal was certainly not Crivelli's, or his patrons'. What can be posited, however, is that Crivelli's Dominican patrons evidently preferred polyptychs, as did the canons who commissioned altarpieces for their cathedrals at Ascoli and Camerino, whereas the single-panelled altarpieces of his later career were all commissioned by the Franciscans, conventuals and observants alike. It remains to be seen whether this was because the carpentry of a *pala quadra* was less costly,<sup>35</sup> because it appealed to a taste for *pale* in the region since the 1450s, prompted by the work of Giovanni Boccati and Giovanni Angelo d'Antonio,<sup>36</sup> or because

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<sup>33</sup> Clerici, "Arte lignaria ed arte orafa: intrecci e confronti," in Papetti and Nardi, *Ascoli ai tempi dell'antica Quintana*, 244-7.

<sup>34</sup> Most accounts of Crivelli's career suggest that the change from polyptych to *pala* indicates a creative progression towards more modern approach. For example, Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli*, 43; Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 391-393; Von Teuffel, "Carlo Crivelli," 93-107. Although Golsenne does not view the progression from polyptych to *pala* in Albertian terms, he sees it as a result of Crivelli's own inclination, inspired by recent trends, failing to take into account other circumstances. Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 194.

<sup>35</sup> The only documented payment for a polyptych is the San Domenico Triptych, for which Crivelli was paid 220 florins, but the price of the woodwork was not recorded. Crivelli was paid roughly the same for his *pala quadra*, but the carved frame of a polyptych, which required more labour and materials, would have been costlier. Coltrinari, "Regesto," 195, doc. 102.

<sup>36</sup> Emanuela Daffra, "Incantesimi per gli Occhi," in Daffra, *Crivelli e Brera*, 24.

Crivelli's *pala*, absent of *pastiglia* or gems and with larger expanses of paint uninterrupted by carved ornament, better reflected Franciscan sensibilities.<sup>37</sup> The spread of one particular typology within an order may otherwise be due to the ease with which friars could visit convents belonging to the province of their own house, or recommendations from one brother to another. The transition from polyptych to *pala quadra* must not, therefore, be understood in positivist terms. The different ornamental and pictorial registers that Crivelli chose for each typology, explored in the final chapters of this thesis, pose far more pressing questions.

The examples I have described above demonstrate that there was a continual oscillation between Crivelli's own creative agency and the conditions of a commission. In some instances, he was required to adapt his pictorial ideas to the boundaries of pre-existing structures; in others, it is impossible to know whether the decision to base a design on a cherished past painting was Crivelli's idea, or his patrons'. A commission could emerge from the desire to update an existing altarpiece in a style more befitting to the current devotional needs of the church and its community, but while keeping the cherished subject and composition largely the same, as may well be the case of the three altarpieces for Camerino noted above. From Crivelli's perspective, the benefits of basing his paintings on past models represented an opportunity to draw upon the efficacy of prestigious devotional images, and work in a language that spoke with immediacy to his new audiences.<sup>38</sup> The lively tradition of painted altarpieces in Camerino also offered Crivelli artistic stimuli, which enriched his creative repertoire in new ways.<sup>39</sup> Ascoli had a far less established tradition of altarpiece painting than Camerino.<sup>40</sup> It was, therefore, left to Crivelli to invigorate the town with a new set of pictorial values, which drew inspiration from the local tradition of goldsmithing and cloth production. Working in Ascoli, therefore, may have offered Crivelli greater control over the entire structure of his altarpieces, not just the painted parts. No contracts for any altarpiece Crivelli painted for the town survive, but the circumstances of the commissions for San Domenico suggest that Crivelli was hired by Fra Costanzo to create an original structure for the newly refurbished church.<sup>41</sup> Regrettably, the frames were destroyed when the altarpieces were dismantled in the eighteenth century.

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<sup>37</sup> On the Franciscan taste for humble materials, see Cole, "Arti povere," 240-62.

<sup>38</sup> Campbell, "On the Importance of Crivelli," 24.

<sup>39</sup> Daffra, "Carlo Crivelli a Camerino," 420-445.

<sup>40</sup> See Ch. One.

<sup>41</sup> See Ch. Two, 67-70.

## Preparation

The meticulous way in which Crivelli's panels were prepared is consistent throughout his career despite his itinerancy, suggesting that he gave his workshop precise instructions. A successfully prepared panel would create an impeccably smooth surface for the application of paint and gold leaf, promoting both their lustre and stability, and enabling Crivelli's paintings to stand the test of time. Although it had been thought that *Saint Peter* and the *Madonna* from the larger altarpiece for San Domenico were executed on lime wood,<sup>42</sup> the 2017 examinations at the National Gallery demonstrated that only the thin strips of wood at the side are lime, whereas the main boards of wood are poplar, in keeping with the norm for Italian painting of this period.<sup>43</sup> X-radiographs of Crivelli's panels for San Domenico reveal freehand, parallel incisions, criss-crossing over the entire surface of the wooden panel (**fig. 97**). These shallow incisions can be observed on many of Crivelli's works, both in X-rays and where there are losses of paint, such as on the two triptychs for Valle Castellana now in Ascoli's Pinacoteca. The function of these incisions is mysterious, though it is likely that they served as an extra security measure for the adhesion of gesso.<sup>44</sup> Absent from other panel paintings of the period and from technical treatises, it is possible that this method was Crivelli's invention, demonstrating the rigour of his procedures to safeguard his creations.<sup>45</sup> Following the incisions, canvas strips were placed over knots, cracks and joins for reinforcement to prevent the painted areas from cracking with time, a standard procedure in use since antiquity.<sup>46</sup> The quantity of panels prepared by combining these security measures, and for paintings executed across different locations of the Marche, is evidence that Crivelli

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<sup>42</sup> Report by F. I.G. Rawlins from the Forest Products Research Laboratory, Festiniog, Wales, 1943, National Gallery Conservation Dossiers, 788.

<sup>43</sup> Verbal communication with Britta New at the National Gallery. It is possible that these side strips correspond with the original carpentry of the frame. Vittore Crivelli's altarpiece in the Church of Santa Maria dell'Assunta, Sarnano, is on poplar, while its original frame is lime. Simone Settembri, "Appunti sulle tecniche di Vittore e Carlo Crivelli," 89.

<sup>44</sup> Castelli, "Osservazioni sulle Carpenterie," 241. Ciro Castelli at the Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence, confirmed verbally that he had not seen them on any other paintings of the period. Gianfranco Pocobene, Chief Conservator at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, who restored the museum's *Saint George*, also described them as "strange" via email. I am grateful to both for their comments.

<sup>45</sup> Such incisions are absent from the work of Vittore Crivelli. Settembri, "Appunti sulle Tecniche di Vittore e Carlo Crivelli," 89. Identification of them in works by painters in Crivelli's circle (Alemanno and Michele da Greco in particular), or in the work of the earlier generation of painters in Venice, would offer further evidence of Crivelli's training and workshop.

<sup>46</sup> Erling Skaug, "'The Third Element': Preliminary Notes on Parchment, Canvas and Fibres as Structural Components Related to the Ground of Medieval and Renaissance Panel Paintings," in *Medieval Painting in Northern Europe: Techniques, Analysis, Art History*, ed. Jilleen Nadolny (London: Archetype Publications, 2006), 182-201.

had specific ideas about how his panels should be prepared, perhaps as a way of counteracting any imperfections in the carpentry that he was required to work with.

The next step was the application of the gesso preparation, necessary to create a stable and smooth surface upon which to paint and gild. Panels from the San Domenico altarpieces that have original, uncut edges, have barbs — straight edges of raised gesso that accumulated in the space between the frame and the panel when it was applied — indicating that the panels were prepared in their frames (**fig. 98**). However, the barb only extends along the vertical side of the panel; at the scalloped arch of the frame, where it would have been more complicated to apply gesso, the preparation extends freely, indicating that the arches were attached separately from the vertical parts of the frame (**fig. 99**). Numerous layers of *gesso sottile*, a fine consistency of gypsum and animal glue, can be seen overlapping one another, following the traditional Venetian practice to achieve a more stable surface.<sup>47</sup>

However, the barb was not the sightline, which is instead indicated by the incision on the gilding to guide punchwork (**fig. 99**). This suggests that the frame was comprised of several elements added at various stages: first, an unembellished matrix of woodwork, which was partially in place when the panels were prepared, followed by an ornamental façade comprised of colonettes, capitals and scalloped arches, in place when a stylus was used to outline the frame on the gilded surface in order to guide punchwork. It was this façade that Tullio Lazzari would describe when he saw the polyptych at the high altar in 1724: “niches, with colonettes, and gothic arches enriched with gold.”<sup>48</sup> This construction is in keeping with the construction of Venetian polyptychs that comprise separately attached carved elements.<sup>49</sup>

The barb and the incised sightline in the gilding suggest that the panels were inserted, removed and reinserted at successive stages of execution in order to ensure the close alignment of image, ornament and architecture. This close correspondence between gesso preparation and frame suggests that the craftsmen responsible for assembling (and perhaps making) the frame were the same as (or working closely with) the person who received instructions from Crivelli on how to prepare and gild the panels.

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<sup>47</sup> On Crivelli's preparation techniques, see Casavecchia, “La tecnica di Carlo Crivelli,” 12; Settembri, “Appunti sulle Tecniche di Vittore e Carlo Crivelli,” 87; Piacentini, “Il Restauro della *Pietà* di Carlo Crivelli,” 348.

<sup>48</sup> Lazzari, *Ascoli in prospettiva*, 76.

<sup>49</sup> In Northern Italy and the Marche, panels were not load-bearing and were therefore separate to the frame, while in Tuscany the panel was integral and load bearing. See Ciro Castelli, “Techniques of Construction of Wood Supports for Painting,” in *Panel Painting. Technique and Conservation of Wood Supports*, ed. Marco Ciatti (Florence: Edifir, 2006), 104.

## Underdrawing

Once the gesso was dry, the underdrawing could be made. Crivelli's underdrawings are striking for their completeness, with both contours and shadows often fully described, and for the closeness of their correspondence with the painted image, demonstrating very few *pentimenti*. They can be understood as detailed maps for painting, achieved by way of various technical processes that reveal an analytical approach to the construction of his highly refined images. Although they are the most studied and admired aspect of his technique, they are also the least understood. There is a great deal of conflicting information in the literature on their media, form and function, and without enough detailed research or available infrared reflectograms, it is not easy to draw firm conclusions. Conservators agree that an initial sketch was made before the principal contours were fixed, but whether this was in dry charcoal or wet media, with a brush or a pen, and whether it was made from the transfer of a cartoon or freehand, is not yet fully understood. Of course, it is possible — likely, even — that Crivelli alternated between all of these approaches. The results of infrared examinations of the panels belonging to the Camerino Cathedral altarpiece suggested to Stefano Volpi that a dry charcoal tool was used;<sup>50</sup> however, such evidence is sparse, and most conservators agree that Crivelli used wet media for his underdrawings. A tiny sketch of the Virgin's lowered head on the exposed ground of the *Madonna and Child* from the high altarpiece for San Domenico in Ascoli is of a dilute liquid media, suggesting that he used this for at least some aspects of his underdrawings (**fig. 100**). Whereas some conservators have suggested that Crivelli made preparatory cartoons for entire figures and compositions, which he transferred from paper by pressing the blackened *verso* onto the prepared panel and tracing the design on the *recto* with a stylus,<sup>51</sup> others have detected signs of *spolvero*, or pouncing dust, indicating that an image was transferred from a pricked

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<sup>50</sup> Stefano Volpi notes that where charcoal is present, the lines are vaguer and granulated without traces of a binder. Volpi, "Indagini stratigrafiche sulle tavole di Carlo Crivelli raffiguranti I Santi Pietro e Paolo I Santi Girolamo e Ansovino: I materiali e la tecnica pittorica," in *Carlo Crivelli alle Gallerie dell'Accademia: Un capolavoro ricomposto*, eds. Giulio Manieri Elia and Emanuela Daffra (Milan: Electa, 2002), exhibition catalogue, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, 65.

<sup>51</sup> Micheli and Patti, "Pittura in costruzione," 248-9; Daphne De Luca in the video, *Crivelli a Montefiore dell'Aso*, produced by the Amministrazione comunale di Montefiore dell'Aso, 2017. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4DkZntqwm8>. Accessed 23 January 2020.

Presumably De Luca arrived at this conclusion as no *spolvero* marks were detected in infrared reflectography. However, as Carmen Bambach has shown, artists could use light-coloured pouncing dusts, as advocated by Cennino, and, moreover, *spolvero* dust was ephemeral and could be easily removed. Bambach, *Drawing and Painting in the Italian Renaissance Workshop: Theory and Practice 1300-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 79.

cartoon.<sup>52</sup> It has, indeed, been suggested that the complexity and scale of Crivelli's compositions would have warranted a cartoon — a hypothesis that is supported by the fact that there are very few *pentimenti* in his underdrawings.<sup>53</sup>

The infrared reflectograms of the panels belonging to the larger altarpiece for San Domenico suggest that Crivelli did indeed use cartoons, though the method of transferral has not been confirmed, since a lack of *spolvero* dust does not necessarily mean that a pricked cartoon was not used; if a painter was diligent, all traces of dust should have been swept away once the contours were fixed.<sup>54</sup> The lines of these underdrawings are fragmented; they stop and start, suggesting that someone was joining up the dots of *spolvero* dusts. This is particularly evident in areas such as the Virgin's white veil (**fig. 101**). The infrared reflectograms of the *Virgin and Child* from the smaller altarpiece, taken in Budapest in 2017, reveal a similarly fragmented line, evident especially around the Virgin's brow bone. The same is true of the underdrawings for the panels of the *Montefiore dell'Aso Altarpiece* still at Montefiore, as well as those for Crivelli's *San Domenico Triptych* in the Brera, particularly around the facial features of Saint Dominic (**fig. 102**). Crivelli also used cartoons for smaller compositions and repetitive ornament. Conservators detected *spolvero* marks on the underdrawing of the *Madonna and Child* in Bergamo.<sup>55</sup>

Crivelli may have learnt how to use pounced drawings in Squarcione's workshop, where multiple Madonnas were produced from cartoons for commercial purposes,<sup>56</sup> or indeed in the Vivarini workshop in Venice, where vegetable motifs were repeated with the use of *spolverezzi* — small pounced drawings for reproducing ornament.<sup>57</sup> *Spolvero* marks were found on the *Madonna della Candeletta* (**fig. 94**) at the festoon arching over the Madonna that repeats on either side,<sup>58</sup> and *spolverezzi*, or perhaps stencils, must also have

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<sup>52</sup> *Spolvero* dust was identified during the examinations of the Vatican's *Pietà* near the Virgin's face. See Piacentini, "Il restauro della *Pietà* di Carlo Crivelli," 348; For the *Madonna and Child* in the Museo Carrara, Bergamo, a pounced cartoon was used. See Maria Clelia Galassi, *Il disegno svelato. Progetto e immagine nella pittura italiana del primo rinascimento* (Ilisso: Nuoro 1998), 123.

<sup>53</sup> Conservators Sara Scatraglia and Andrea Carini at the Pinacoteca di Brera, whom I want to thank, voiced this opinion in a conversation in November 2016.

<sup>54</sup> As noted by Rachel Billinge at the National Gallery, whom I want to thank for discussing the infrared reflectograms of the San Domenico altarpiece with me.

<sup>55</sup> Galassi, *Il disegno svelato*, 123.

<sup>56</sup> Casu, "Giorgio Schiavone e Carlo Crivelli," 40. Evidence of the use of cartoons in Squarcione's workshop is a document describing the young Mantegna as a "pouncer" in 1441. Bambach, *Drawing and Painting*, 30.

<sup>57</sup> On *Spolverezzi*, see Jill Dunkerton and Carol Plazzotta, "Drawing and Design in Italian Renaissance Painting," in Bomford, *Art in the Making*, 61-63. On the Vivarini's use of cartoons, see Maria Chiara Ceriotti, "Tecnica esecutiva, vicende conservative e restauro," in *La Madonna in trono con Gesù Bambino' di Antonio Vivarini e Giovanni d'Alemagna. Storia e restauro*, eds. Carlo Cavalli and Andrea Nante (Verona: Scripta Edizioni, 2014) exhibition catalogue, Museo Diocesano, Padua, 80.

<sup>58</sup> Micheli and Patti, "Pittura in Costruzione," 250.

been used for Crivelli's brocade patterns, as the repetitive design is never foreshortened with the folds of drapery. Crivelli's paintings are abundant with brocade patterns, whose execution he must have delegated to an assistant. The use of *spolverezzi* was common practice in the fourteenth century, combined with a freehand drawing for the figure; cartoons for the figures emerged during the first half of the Quattrocento, but were not widely used until the sixteenth century owing to the high cost of paper.<sup>59</sup> Rather than make a single cartoon for the whole composition, it is likely that Crivelli used separate cartoons for distinct elements, as was common practice in the period: for example, Piero della Francesca used *spolverezzi* for textiles and repeated architectural ornament, as well as cartoons for some of his heads, drawing in the rest of the body freehand.<sup>60</sup>

Although the elements of Crivelli's altarpieces are often very similar, he in fact never repeated figures, faces or details; each image is unique.<sup>61</sup> This separates Crivelli from some other painters in Squarcione's circle, such as Niccolò di Liberatore da Foligno (c.1430-1502), as well as his colleagues in the Marche, who used cartoons to repeat figures across multiple compositions.<sup>62</sup> What Crivelli's use of cartoons does suggest, however, is that he was running a busy and successful enterprise that required the use of a facilitating process to execute his paintings. The use of cartoons may, indeed, imply the intervention of assistants. A cartoon would have enabled Crivelli to control his designs whilst entrusting the mechanical process of transition from paper to panel to a member of the workshop.

However, at times Crivelli drew freehand. The infrared reflectogram of the *Massa Fermana Altarpiece* (1468; **fig. 7**), his earliest dated altarpiece, reveals fluent, continuous lines that loosely sketch out form, evident particularly in the torso of the *Dead Christ* (**fig. 103**). The infrared reflectogram of Crivelli's *Dead Christ Supported by Two Angels* — once part of the *Montefiore dell'Aso Altarpiece* and now in the National Gallery — revealed the presence of multiple, searching lines at Christ's neck and right hand, and at the left angel's arms in a dilute wet media (**fig. 104**). These were then fixed with darker, more concentrated, lines once the correct contour had been found.<sup>63</sup> Jill Dunkerton suggested that Crivelli was working from pen-and-ink studies on paper, much like the surviving ones by Marco Zoppo in the British Museum, which he would have transferred by eye onto the prepared panel.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Dunkerton and Plazzotta, "Drawing and Design," 64.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> As noted in Jill Dunkerton, "The *Dead Christ Supported by Two Angels*," in Bomford, *Art in the Making*, 98.

<sup>62</sup> For example, Niccolò di Liberatore reused his cartoon of *Saint Francis* for several paintings. Bambach, *Drawing and Painting*, 115, fig. 107. On the use of cartoons by Crivelli's followers, see 122.

<sup>63</sup> Dunkerton, "The *Dead Christ Supported by Two Angels*," 98.

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

It is interesting to note, therefore, that Crivelli used two different types of underdrawing in the *Montefiore dell'Aso Altarpiece*. Whereas the National Gallery's *Dead Christ* is underdrawn quite sparsely, with loose, open hatching in some areas to suggest the fall of light, the underdrawings of the other panels still at Montefiore are more schematic; they appear to have been made with cartoons, and the folds of drapery and facial planes have extensive and descriptive hatching. Dunkerton rejected the idea that the drawing of *Saint Peter* in Cambridge, Massachusetts (**fig. 105**), which relates to the *Saint Peter* of the predella for Montefiore, was by Crivelli, nor that it could have been used in the design process, due to its "scratchy, rather uncontrolled hatching, always at the same angle, and including the head — when shading in Crivelli's underdrawing is limited mainly to the draperies."<sup>65</sup> But this manner of drawing is in fact identical to the underdrawing of *Saint Peter* in the main tier, and features often in the underdrawings of other works (**fig. 106**). Moreover, it has been noted that the drawing in Cambridge records how the predella figure looked before it was overpainted at some point shortly before or after entering the Detroit Institute of Arts in 1928: the saint once had a tonsure, the rim of his collar was uneven and the drapery was gathered over his left shoulder, as in the drawing.<sup>66</sup> The drawing was not a cartoon, as it is smaller than the painted image. Its function may have been to inform the Crivelli, or whoever made the underdrawing, where to apply the hatching.

It would seem, therefore, that while Crivelli executed some of his underdrawings more liberally, such as the *Dead Christ* — whose painted panel he signed — others were developed using cartoons and with extensive hatching, both for the face and drapery. Although difficult to determine, the existence of more descriptive underdrawings compared to others may suggest workshop intervention, either at the drawing or the painting stage, or both. The coexistence of two different methods in a single altarpiece may also support Lightbown's suggestion that the *Montefiore dell'Aso Altarpiece* was executed across a period of several years, between 1471 and 1473.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the earliest painting for which I have had access to infrared reflectograms — *The Massa Fermana Altarpiece* — appear to have freehand underdrawings, and the later ones suggest the use of cartoons. This may imply an evolution of working process that developed as Crivelli received more commissions.

The extent to which Crivelli's underdrawings can be understood as "*disegni pittorici*," as Maria Clelia Galassi described them — an attractive idea which has become basis for most

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>66</sup> Danielle Carrabino, "*Saint Peter*, c. 1470," in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, 176-177.

<sup>67</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 186.

subsequent interpretations — is, therefore, problematic.<sup>68</sup> Whereas figures such as *Saints Peter and Clare* of the Montefiore dell’Aso Altarpiece were underdrawn with extensive descriptive information for shadows and lights that would later characterise the tonal values of painting (**fig. 106**), others, like the National Gallery *Dead Christ*, have more sparse lines and little hatching (**fig. 104**). The more common method seems to have been the former, which also characterises the underdrawings of the San Domenico altarpieces, with their very few *pentimenti* (**fig. 107**). The degree to which Crivelli’s extensive hatching in the underdrawing was intended to be partly seen, contributing to the tonal values of the finished painting is unclear; its occasional visibility may be due to the increasing transparency of the paint with time.<sup>69</sup> It is also possible that carbon-based pigments used in the painting appear in the infrared reflectogram, making it hard to determine what is underdrawing and what is paint.<sup>70</sup>

A fact that supports the notion that Crivelli intended his underdrawings to remain hidden is that the information conveyed could sometimes be elaborated in a different way in the painting. The changes should not be seen as *pentimenti*, as the idea did not change, only its form. For example, where the pink velvet lining of Saint Sebastian’s cape from the *Second Triptych of Valle Castellana* (c.1472, Pinacoteca Comunale di Ascoli Piceno) goes over his shoulder, the texture in the underdrawing is indicated with multiple short strokes lining the edges (**fig. 108**). But in the painting, these small textural strokes go over the entire surface of the velvet (**fig. 109**). The function of the marks in the underdrawing was to provide a summary of how the texture should be executed in paint, but they themselves were not intended to be seen. Similarly, in the underdrawing for *Saint George and the Dragon* (1470; **fig. 16**), the spacing of the horse’s teeth is different from how they were eventually realised in painting.<sup>71</sup> The underdrawing of the *Madonna and Child* for the same altarpiece now in Washington also differs from the final image in the arms of the throne, where the fish scale pattern of the drawing does not align with the painted image (**fig. 90**).<sup>72</sup> In *Saint Stephen* from the upper tier of the larger altarpiece for San Domenico (**fig. 91**), the shadow in the folds of the saint’s dalmatic is suggested with sparse cross hatching, but in the painting the

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<sup>68</sup> Galassi, *Il disegno svelato*, 50-55.

<sup>69</sup> Research has focused on the transparency of oil, but Rachel Billinge tells me that tempera is chemically similar to oil because of the oily component of the yolk. See Stephen Rees Jones, “The changed appearance of oil paintings due to increased transparency,” *Studies in Conservation* 36, no. 3 (1991): 151-154.

<sup>70</sup> Micheli and Patti, “Pittura in Costruzione,” 246.

<sup>71</sup> Pocobene, “Carlo Crivelli’s *St. George Slaying the Dragon*,” fig. 64.

<sup>72</sup> Paula DeCristofaro, “Examination Summary. Carlo Crivelli, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Donor*, 1952.5.6,” National Gallery of Art Painting Conservation Department, February 16, 1987.

direction of the hatching sculpted as it follows the shape of form. What these examples suggest is that Crivelli's underdrawings provided information on how to execute the painting, but the graphic information itself was meant to be masked by paint.

The use of light incisions made with a metal stylus was Crivelli's final step in the underdrawing process. On both altarpieces for San Domenico, incisions can be seen marking out the folds of drapery, outlining the painted contours to separate them from gold leaf, and defining the principal lines of architecture on the central panel. In each case, the function was different: drawn folds of drapery would later become masked by dark paint, and therefore incisions meant that they remained visible at subsequent stages of painting (**fig. 110**). Gold leaf, which was applied prior to painting, could also mask the drawn contours, since it was difficult to achieve precise outlines with the square-shaped pieces of leaf.<sup>73</sup> Whereas with architecture, it was probably easier to use a stylus for incising straight or curved lines along a ruler or compass, as opposed to a pen or brush.<sup>74</sup>

The presence of a worked-up drawing under the painted image had a precise function in the art of Crivelli and his contemporaries whose techniques, particularly early on in their careers, reflect Venetian and Paduan practice. Dunkerton and Galassi have described how the volumetric underdrawings of Crivelli, Tura, Marco Zoppo and the young Giovanni Bellini excavate form in a way that recalls the three-dimensional surfaces of metalwork or marble relief.<sup>75</sup> It is possible that the habitual copying of reliefs by Donatello and his circle in Padua, and, in the case of Tura, producing drawings to be translated into three-dimensional media, informed this analytical way of drawing. Even though it was intended to remain hidden, the presence of Crivelli's fully worked underdrawing on the panel encouraged a methodical approach to painting, which, enhanced by the hatched technique of tempera, introduces a graphic charge to the final image. This graphic aesthetic was further enhanced by the black painted lines on the uppermost surface that follow every contour. The painted image, charged by Crivelli's articulate underdrawing, almost competes in its brilliance with the reflective and precious gold leaf against which it is seen.

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<sup>73</sup> In infrared, it is possible to see where gold leaf crosses the boundaries of the incised lines.

<sup>74</sup> Dunkerton and Plazzotta, "Drawing and Design," 75. Incisions were used in this way by the Vivarini partners. See Ceriotti, "Tecnica esecutiva," 78.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

## Relief, water gilding and tooling

Once the underdrawing was complete, the relief elements were applied. Crivelli pursued the dimensional possibilities of ornamental relief to a greater degree than any other painter of the fifteenth century. In particular, he appears to have been the only painter that modulated the thickness of relief depending on its relationship to painted volume. Far from being attached to the surface unthinkingly as a separate entity, as it often was by the earlier generation of painters in Venice, Crivelli's relief is carefully sculpted in *pastiglia*, textured, gilded and glazed, and applied thoughtfully so that it is an integrated part of the image. Its connectedness to the image is particularly evident in the RTI image of *Saint Stephen*: the *pastiglia* cord gently ruffles with the movement of the saint's embroidered orphrey; it tapers off from view around the sleeve (**fig. 111**). Relief is only ever present in confined settings — either polyptychs or small devotional Madonnas — and it profoundly alters the way in which we, as viewers, engage with a work. This is primarily because relief has a physical and thus worldly substance, which in turn draws attention to the fictive nature of painted representation. The special effects of Crivelli's relief are explored in detail in Chapter Four.

Aside from the carved frame, Saint Peter's papal attire is the most emphatically three-dimensional aspect of the larger altarpiece for San Domenico, Ascoli (**figs. 47, 48**).<sup>76</sup> It is also the most mixed media, incorporating real cord or rope to line the orphrey and to hold the keys together; both linear and carved *pastiglia*; carved wood nailed to the panel for the keys, morse and staff; as well as imitation pearls and gems embedded into the panel. Objects often reappear rendered with different materials and techniques. So whereas Peter's mitre, morse and gloves have separately-attached gems, his jewelled rings are rendered in *pastiglia* alone, and whereas actual rope is used for most of the orphrey and to hold the keys, imitative rope in *pastiglia* is used for the orphrey on the left-hand side of the figure, and the rope motif in the ground is tooled.<sup>77</sup>

Crivelli used different types of *pastiglia*: gesso with a greater quantity of glue was dribbled with a long, fine vair brush, or piped through a nozzled cloth bag for linear areas, such as the scalloped interior rims of halos,<sup>78</sup> whereas a larger quantity of gesso was used for the thicker outer border of the halo, which would have been modelled with a chisel or razor

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<sup>76</sup> On the possibility that this was for doctrinal emphasis, Ch. Two, 93-4.

<sup>77</sup> On the interaction between different types of media and matter in Crivelli's work, see Ch. Six.

<sup>78</sup> Jilleen Nadolny describes this method as extrusion. See Nadolny, "The Techniques and Use of Gilded Relief Decoration by Northern European Painters, c. 1200–1500" (PhD thesis., Courtauld Institute, University of London, 2000), 40, 42, 59, fig. 4.

once dry to achieve the desired smoothness (**fig. 112**).<sup>79</sup> Sculptural areas of *pastiglia*, such as the body of Christ on the crucifix mounting Peter's staff and the *putto's* head in Michael's armour, were also achieved in this way (**figs. 113, 36**). During the XRF examinations, mercury was found in the *pastiglia*.<sup>80</sup> This would align with Cennino's advice to add Armenian bole to the *pastiglia* to make it easier to see against the white of the prepared panel, thus allowing for greater accuracy when shaping it.

These relief ornaments insert Crivelli's work into a category of Italian Renaissance picture wherein the support becomes host to a range of materials extraneous to the traditional medium of fresco or easel painting. Examples are Simone Martini's *Maestà* fresco in Siena's Palazzo Pubblico (1315), which includes glass, paste gems, tin leaf and actual parchment for the scrolls and books,<sup>81</sup> and Michele Giambono's *Saint Chrysogonus* (c. 1450, Church of San Trovaso, Venice), where the armour and harness are embellished with metallic studs and gilt *papier-mâché* relief.<sup>82</sup> The *Madonnas* of Giovanni Ambrogio Bevilacqua (c.1500-10) are the most extravagantly multimedia of this curious genre: painted flesh is combined with garments depicted in real sequins, gold and silver thread, gold studs, coloured stones, enamel and velvet (**fig. 114**).<sup>83</sup> If the use of materials with a physical affinity to that which they depict laid claim to a convincing realism, enhancing the immediacy with which the viewer experienced the sacred image, it also transformed painting into a luxury object, worthy of honouring the holy beings represented.

Crivelli's use of relief, and his *pastiglia* in particular, was informed by exposure to the work of the previous generation of painters in Venice. Michele Giambono's newly restored *Paradiso* (c.1447) includes extensive, but damaged, *pastiglia* executed using cast wax, which has its technical origins in northern Italian mural painting.<sup>84</sup> However, Giambono, who based his design on the Vivarini's *Coronation of the Virgin* (1444) in San Pantalon, chose not to imitate the Vivarini's *pastiglia* technique, which is gesso applied with a brush and then sometimes carved for larger areas (**fig. 115**). The Vivarini never appear to have used cast *pastiglia*, which was widely used by Venetian painters, exemplified by Jacobello del Fiore's

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<sup>79</sup> Cennino, *Il Libro dell'Arte*, 156, Ch. 119.

<sup>80</sup> Helen Howard, Marika Spring and Rachel Billinge, internal report on analysis of NG788.

<sup>81</sup> Norman Muller, "Paper in Simone Martini's frescoed *Maestà*", *The Quarterly* 82 (2012): 12-13.

<sup>82</sup> Matteo Ceriana and Valeria Poletto, eds., *Il Paradiso Riconquistato. Trame d'oro e colore nella pittura di Michele Giambono* (Venice: Marsilio, 2016), exhibition catalogue, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, 163.

<sup>83</sup> Chiara Buss, ed., *Silk Gold Crimson: Secrets and Technology at the Visconti and Sforza Courts* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2009), 149-154.

<sup>84</sup> Milena Dean, "Sulla tecnica di Giambono: prime considerazioni" in Ceriana and Poletto, *Il paradiso riconquistato*, 127; Barbara Fabjan, Marco Cardinali and Maria Beatrice De Ruggieri, eds., *Materiali e tecniche nella pittura murale del Quattrocento*, I (Rome: ENEA, 2001).

magisterial demonstration of the technique in his *Justice Triptych* (**fig. 116**).<sup>85</sup> Hand-applied *pastiglia*, which Crivelli always used, allows for a more synthesized relationship with the painted areas than the separately-attached cast alternative.<sup>86</sup> This may suggest that Crivelli learned *pastiglia* from Antonio Vivarini and Giovanni Alemagna, offering evidence of his undocumented association with the Murano workshop.<sup>87</sup> However, with Crivelli's polyptychs, the detail and precision of the relief, and particularly the ways in which it interacts within the painted design, are unlike anything seen in Italian painting before or after Crivelli.

With the relief in place, Crivelli could apply water gilding to the gesso-prepared ground. Crivelli manipulates gold with the same creative power with which he manipulates paint, bestowing it with representational and symbolic values that make it an essential and integral part of an image. Paradoxically, at the time when Crivelli had reached his maturity in 1470-90, the use of gold in easel painting had already been in decline in the major Italian centres for several decades. Some scholars argue that this decline was simultaneous with the rise of linear perspective, which drew attention away from the painted surface and towards the internal recession of the image.<sup>88</sup> Gold, with its reflective quality, counteracts internal pictorial logic due to its dependence on an external light source. The sense that Crivelli was, therefore, using gold knowingly is suggested by the gold beam that transverses the perspective of the *Annunciation* (**fig. 2**), betraying its fiction.<sup>89</sup>

Having applied Armenian bole mixed with animal glue to the prepared ground to give a warm glow to the gold,<sup>90</sup> Crivelli laid on the sheets of leaf, burnishing the gilded surface with a hard stone once it was dry to make it reflective like solid gold.<sup>91</sup> With the gold ground, Crivelli was executing the first surface that would be seen by the viewer. Due to its monetary and symbolic value, it was important to get right. The overall cost of gold and

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<sup>85</sup> Based on my own observations of their work, which I have viewed in Venice, the UK and at the 2016 exhibition in Conegliano (Amanda Hilliam, "Review of The Vivarini: Conegliano," *The Burlington Magazine* 158 (2016): 580-82).

<sup>86</sup> Crivelli did not use wax relief, cast relief or pressed brocade, unlike most of his Venetian predecessors. See Dean, "Sulla tecnica di Giambono," 127-128. Conservators treating the *pastiglia* mantle of Crivelli's *Madonna and Child* at the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo explored the possible use of cast relief, dismissing it for the absence of tin that is used for this procedure. Fagnani et al., "Il restauro di un dipinto di Carlo Crivelli," 224.

<sup>87</sup> See Ch. One, 10-12.

<sup>88</sup> Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 83-90; Jeanne Nuechterlein, "From Medieval to Modern: Gold and the Value of Representation in Early Netherlandish Painting," (York: Department of History of Art, University of York, 2013), accessed online on 23 January 2020 at <http://hoaportal.york.ac.uk/hoaportal/medievalToModern.jsp>: 14.

<sup>89</sup> See Ch. Five, 162-3.

<sup>90</sup> The bright orange colour of the bole can be seen at the edges of the panels for San Domenico, as well as through losses in the gold.

<sup>91</sup> Cennini, *Il Libro dell'Arte*, 168-9, Ch. 134.

gilding represented 30 to 40 per cent of the full cost of most altarpiece commissions in the fifteenth century.<sup>92</sup> This might explain why contracting parties often chose different metals to simulate the effects of gold, such as tin and other alloys. However, XRF analysis carried out on panels in the National Gallery and the Pinacoteca di Brera confirmed that Crivelli only ever used pure gold.<sup>93</sup> Cennino is adamant about the use of good quality gold leaf, which, when applied with skill, could bring the painter “great credit and repute.”<sup>94</sup> In order to ensure this, he offers numerous tips, such as gilding during the damp winter months and leaving the leaf unvarnished: for gold, according to Cennino, is “very particular.”<sup>95</sup>

Once burnished, the gold grounds of both altarpieces for San Domenico were decorated with brocade patterns using an iron tool.<sup>96</sup> Cennino describes the techniques of punchwork or “granulation”, as “one of the loveliest branches which we have.”<sup>97</sup> The shimmering effects of Crivelli’s tooled brocades can be admired in natural light, whereas the immaculate way in which they are executed is most apparent in the RTI images, where they appear clearly indented in the gold ground (**fig. 117**). Although both altarpieces have the same patterns, the scale of the design is slightly smaller in the later altarpiece, so the same *spolverezzi* or stencils cannot have been used for both altarpieces.<sup>98</sup> When the panels of the high altarpiece were viewed out of their frame at the National Gallery, it was clear that the tooling followed the incised sightlines precisely, whereas painting often went way beyond (**fig. 99**). As well as the laborious nature of the tooling (why would the puncher have gone beyond where was necessary?), the careful way in which the incisions were followed bespeaks of the diligence of an assistant following his master’s guidance.<sup>99</sup> Cennino describes “granulation” as one of the tasks — along with preparing pigments, glues and priming panels — that the apprentice must practice for six years before they are entrusted

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<sup>92</sup> Michelle O’Malley, *The Business of Art. Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), table 2B, 56.

<sup>93</sup> Howard, Spring and Billinge, internal report on analysis of NG788. Some of the results brought up impure metals, such as copper, but only on the areas that had been re-gilded in modern times. Scatragli, “Il Polittico di Carlo Crivelli per San Domenico,” 479.

<sup>94</sup> Cennino, *Il Libro dell’Arte*, 217, Ch. 185.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 171, Ch. 136.

<sup>96</sup> On the tools used for punchwork, and on tooling in early Italian painting more generally, see Erling S. Skaug, *Punch Marks from Giotto to Fra Angelico. Attribution, Chronology and Workshop Relationships in Tuscan Panel Painting with particular consideration to Florence, c. 1330-1430*, 2 vols. (Oslo: Nordic Group of IIC, 1994) 1:58-61.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>98</sup> On Crivelli’s brocade patterns and the appearance of the same design in multiple works, see Rembrandt Duits, *Gold Brocade and Renaissance Painting. A Study in Material Culture*, (London: Findar Press, 2008), 47-9.

<sup>99</sup> As noted in conversation with Rachel Billinge and Marika Spring.

with painting.<sup>100</sup> It is, therefore, quite possible that Crivelli may have entrusted his tooling to an assistant.

## Painting

It was only now that painting could begin. The painted areas were the main focus of the viewer's attention, but their success was determined by the meticulous stages of preparation outlined above. Gold leaf and its decoration had to reach suitable levels of refinement in order to become an honorific foil against which the sacred figures could come to life. Crivelli was one of the greatest and final exponents of the tempera technique. Dunkerton described Crivelli as "that master of the conventions of tempera painting,"<sup>101</sup> while Joseph Archer Crowe and Giovanni Battista Cavacaselle, who wrote the first extended analysis of Crivelli's art in English, observed,

as a tempera painter, he is admittedly a master of great energy. His medium, which was always liquid and pure, was of such a durable substance, that, when brought up by varnish to a warm brown tone, it never altered; and there is no artist of the century whose panels have more surely resisted the ravages of time.<sup>102</sup>

As I argue in Chapter Five, his tempera technique pushes the medium to the limits of possibility, so that painted forms are so refined, realism turns in on itself and artifice prevails.

As a binder, Crivelli used egg, and sometimes a combination of egg and oil.<sup>103</sup>

Whereas analysis can tell us what medium is present, it cannot tell us whether Crivelli's medium was *tempera grassa* — an emulsion of egg and oil — or whether he used tempera and oil separately for specific colours and pigments.<sup>104</sup> According to scientists at the National Gallery, the latter was common in the work of fifteenth-century Italian artists: "Typically, egg tempera is found in the lighter coloured passages or in underpaints, while oil was used in

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<sup>100</sup> Cennino, *Il Libro dell'Arte*, 138, Ch. 104.

<sup>101</sup> Dunkerton, "Painting Techniques in Venice," in *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the Time of Bellini, Dürer and Titian*, eds. Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown (Venice: Bompiani, 1999), exhibition catalogue. Palazzo Grassi, Venice, 93.

<sup>102</sup> Crowe and Cavacaselle, *A History of Painting in North Italy*, 1:85.

<sup>103</sup> John Mills and Raymond White, "Organic Analysis in the Arts: Some Further Paint Medium Analyses," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 2 (1978): 71-6; John Mills and Raymond White, "Analyses of Paint Media," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 11 (1987): 92-5; Raymond White and Jennifer Pilc, "Analyses of Paint Media," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 14 (1993): 86-94; Casavecchia, "La tecnica di Carlo Crivelli," 13-14.

<sup>104</sup> Catherine Higgitt and Raymond White, "Analyses of Paint Media: New Studies of Italian Paintings in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *The National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 26 (2005): 90.

other areas, usually the richer, darker colours, or in the final glazes.”<sup>105</sup> The difference is significant, as the use of an emulsion would suggest that Crivelli was using oil to produce specific visual effects, while its use for certain colours would suggest a technical reason. It has been argued that Crivelli alternated between egg and oil to simulate the qualities of different surfaces.<sup>106</sup> With Crivelli’s fascination with the world of objects, and his technical brilliance, it is likely that he was aware of the respective aesthetic potentials of egg and oil.<sup>107</sup> However, medium analysis has shown that for one of his last works, *The Immaculate Conception* (1493; **fig. 67**) he used purely egg.<sup>108</sup> As one of his final paintings, technically it should embody the consummate knowledge of his artistry, and the lack of oil suggests that he did not require it as a binder to produce the effects he was after. This may therefore imply that he used oil with certain colours. Although oil is viewed by many as the more progressive medium, tempera, as I will show in Chapter Five, had many virtues and was favoured by other fifteenth-century Italian painters, including Mantegna. Since the medium analysis on Crivelli’s paintings was carried out in the 1970s and ‘80s, technologies have advanced and new examinations would provide more conclusive information about Crivelli’s use of oil.

Conservators often remark upon the thinness of Crivelli’s paint films. But what has been largely overlooked is the innovative way in which he took advantage of the whiteness of the ground layer for achieving the highlights of drapery folds. In her unpublished report on the Porto San Giorgio *Madonna and Child* (**fig. 90**), Paula DeCristofaro described the technique of the Virgin’s red bodice and shirt as a “saturated, glaze-like paint in the darker folds,” with the brushstrokes

feathered out to a thin transparent surface which barely covers the white ground layer below. Here the light-coloured ground itself, visible through the thin, overlying transparent paint, serves to form the lightest and “highest” point of the three-dimensional illusion (as compared to the technique employed for the fleshtones).<sup>109</sup>

This was also the technique employed to render Saint Peter’s red cope, which achieves an astonishing sense of plasticity (**fig. 118**).

Barbara Casavecchia has offered a summary of Crivelli’s pigments, the most comprehensive to date.<sup>110</sup> She notes that Crivelli used a restricted palette, a fact that cannot

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<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Daffra, “Trittico di San Domenico,” 296; Alessandra Fregolent, “Materia e immagine in Carlo Crivelli,” *Arte Documento* 10 (1996): 30-31.

<sup>107</sup> On the aesthetic properties of Crivelli’s painting technique, and its meanings, see Ch. Five.

<sup>108</sup> Mills and White, “Analyses of Paint Media,” (1987): 93.

<sup>109</sup> DeCristofaro, “Examination Summary.”

<sup>110</sup> Casavecchia, “La tecnica di Carlo Crivelli,” 14-15.

have been due to difficulties in obtaining pigments in the Marche, since already by 1326, Ascoli had formed an alliance with the Veneto region enabling the free passage of people and their products for commercial exchange, which remained in force for the entire Quattrocento.<sup>111</sup> Instead, I would argue that his limited but brilliant palette was deliberate. It has the effect of restricting naturalism, which was one of the main goals of his art. Crivelli's enamel-like colours are more vibrant and celebratory than would be appropriate in everyday life.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, his palette, which rotates around two or three colours for each work, maintains the status of his paintings as works of art, since it gives a decorative quality and a rhythm to the image that evokes an artificial order. *The Coronation of the Virgin*, for example, rotates around deep reds, dark blues and greens, and a yellow, which is both supplemented by and confused with abundant gold (**fig. 119**). These colours unite the figures so that they are mutually engaged in a *sacra conversazione*, giving the image a potency via its own supernatural order.

Crivelli favoured certain colour-combinations, in particular a pink-red with green.<sup>113</sup> Other than the mendicant saints, every figure of the high altarpiece for San Domenico wears clothing lined with a rich olive green, and the dominant colour of their outer garment is a variation on pink, though with the Virgin and Catherine, Crivelli also introduced a deep and regal blue (**figs. 32, 78**). Both Michael and Lucy of the smaller altarpiece wear cloaks alternately lined with pink and green (**figs. 120, 33**). Further research is required in order to understand precisely why Crivelli selected these colours and their pigments. Rather than availability, it must have been a question of their value – monetary, symbolic or artistic. In some cases, as Lightbown suggested, Crivelli may have drawn on colour symbolism to infuse his images with multi-layers of meaning.<sup>114</sup> And, undoubtedly, Crivelli understood that pink and green were at opposite ends of the colour spectrum, and that placing them in close proximity would generate visual energy.<sup>115</sup> On the other hand, particular hues and their combinations may even have stood as demonstrations of Crivelli's artistry. Pigment analysis of Crivelli's greens suggested that their mixture was complex, composed of natural ultramarine, lead white, and a yellow dyestuff obtained from Persian berries (buckthorn),<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Fabiani, *Ascoli nel Quattrocento*, 1:321.

<sup>112</sup> On Ascoli's sumptuary laws, their restrictions and the relationship with Crivelli's paintings, see Leopardi, "Ornamentis secundum condecetium sui status," 255-69.

<sup>113</sup> As noted in Casavecchia, "La tecnica di Carlo Crivelli," 14.

<sup>114</sup> For example, discussing the green of *Saint Emidius's* cope in the cathedral altarpiece, he notes that it was the "especial colour of Bishops," as well as "the symbol of a life of holiness and justice." See Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 161.

<sup>115</sup> My thanks to the artist Charlie Ritchie for pointing this out.

<sup>116</sup> Van Os, *The Early Venetian paintings in Holland*, 68; Casavecchia, "La tecnica di Carlo Crivelli," 14.

while three different reds –ochre, vermilion and lakes – were sometimes combined to obtain a single hue.<sup>117</sup>

The consistently immaculate execution of Crivelli's paintings makes it hard to attribute certain figures, sections, or indeed entire works to his assistants. Predella panels, peripheral figures and ornament, such as fruit and architecture, are where we might expect to find workshop intervention in the work of most painters of this period. However, when viewing the panels from both the lower and upper tiers of the high altarpiece for San Domenico at close quarters, we noticed that the half-length saints perhaps even surpassed the main figures in their dynamic gestures, individualised features and virtuoso finish. Moreover, in many of the small-scale panels that I have had the opportunity to inspect – particularly the narrative scenes from *Madonna della Rondine* and the *Massa Fermana Altarpiece* (**figs. 121, 122**), as well as the pinnacles of the San Domenico triptych for Camerino (**fig. 123**) – the idiosyncrasies of Crivelli's authorship are only concentrated and intensified. In the pinnacles, for example, the exquisite handling of tempera paint and the obsession with casual detail, such as the way the rug above Mary's house folds over at the edges, as it is just larger than the opening from which it hangs, and the splintered but entirely convincing view of the bird seen through the wooden bars of the cage above Gabriele, give the images a metaphysical atmosphere that pervades Crivelli's most emblematic work.<sup>118</sup> The same is true of the *Saint Sebastian* in the Museo Poldi Pezzoli (**fig. 124**), which may have originally been inserted within the frame of *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter* (**fig. 21**): anatomy is dynamic, description is heightened and the handling is precious. And as is widely appreciated, fruit is a protagonist and is painted with due attention. It is in the seemingly peripheral where the viewer finds meaning in Crivelli's art.

For this, I do not agree with Nancy Turner's proposal that manuscript illuminators and embroiderers were responsible for executing the dynamic small-scale figures found on orphreys and predella panels, even though Crivelli must have frequented the studios of such artisans.<sup>119</sup> Rather, I would suggest that Crivelli trusted his assistants with painting large expanses of non-figural passages, such as drapery, which perhaps explains why the fall of light on the folds is often so carefully prescribed in the underdrawing. It is very hard to imagine, for example, that Crivelli would have been responsible for every brushstroke of Saint Dominic's huge and immobile black habit in the high altarpiece for San Domenico (**fig.**

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<sup>117</sup> Volpi, "Indagini stratigrafiche," 66.

<sup>118</sup> In Ch. Six, such casual details are termed "cogent irrelevancies." See 167-70.

<sup>119</sup> See Ch. One.

80). Master painters like Crivelli with workshops did not have time to execute every single brushstroke in their large-scale works.

Crivelli seems to have entrusted his more accomplished assistants with commissions of lesser importance, for which he would receive a smaller fee, such as the lost altarpiece for the friars of San Lorenzo, Ascoli. The contract specifies a payment of 50 ducats for the whole altarpiece, much less than his usual fee of about 200 ducats, and the painter Michele da Greco is listed as a witness, perhaps signalling his involvement in this commission.<sup>120</sup> Similarly, as Lightbown proposed, it is likely that the altarpiece dated 1481 formerly in the church of San Gregorio Magno in Ascoli was entirely executed by Crivelli's assistants while he was away in Camerino (fig. 125).<sup>121</sup> Federico Zeri suggested that the same assistant or assistants were involved in executing the panels now attributed to Carlo from the Monte San Martino Altarpiece, which dates to the same period (fig. 126).<sup>122</sup> This altarpiece demonstrates the work of several hands, bringing together assistants from the workshops of both Carlo and his brother, Vittore, as well as possibly their personal intervention. The fact that the *Baptist* and *Blaise* attributed to Vittore on the lower tier were made from cartoons later reused in an altarpiece by Crivelli's assistant, Pietro Alemanno, demonstrates how designs could be circulated and reused by painters in Carlo's circle.<sup>123</sup>

Crivelli's assistants whose work we know of individually — Pietro Alemanno and Michele da Greco — were not first-rate painters.<sup>124</sup> Crivelli did not have access to an array of talented apprentices, like his contemporaries in Florence — Verrocchio, for example. Alemanno and Michele da Greco cannot have had significant painting responsibilities in Crivelli's workshop, although Alemanno's hand is sometimes discernible on lesser commissions that Crivelli received in Ascoli and its environs, which typically have a red as opposed to a gold ground (fig. 31).<sup>125</sup> Nor did Crivelli appear to have collaborated with his

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<sup>120</sup> Coltrinari, "Regesto Documentario," doc. 118, p. 196. It has been suggested that the little-known Albanian painter Michele Greco da Valona was Crivelli's *garzone* in Ascoli, a proposal ignored in recent Crivelli studies, which I find entirely plausible. See Daniele Ferrara, "Michele Greco da Valona nel "Rinascimento Adriatico:" Pittore e Committenti fra Oriente e Occidente," in *Il Rinascimento Danzante: Michele Greco da Valona e gli Artisti dell'Adriatico tra Abruzzo e Molise*, eds. Lucia Arbace and Daniele Ferrara (Turin: Umberto Allemandi, 2011), exhibition catalogue, Museo della Marsica-Castello Piccolomini, Cellano, 28.

<sup>121</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 316.

<sup>122</sup> Federico Zeri, *Diari di Lavoro 2* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1976), 73-74.

<sup>123</sup> Papetti and Di Provvio, *Pietro Alemanno*, 124-126.

<sup>124</sup> On Crivelli's circle, see Pietro Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli e i crivelleschi* (Venice: Edizioni Alfieri Venezia, 1961), exhibition catalogue, Palazzo Ducale, Venice, 142-229; Papetti and Di Provvio, *Pietro Alemanno*; Coltrinari and Delpriori, *Vittore Crivelli*; Golssen, *Carlo Crivelli*, 159-162, 170-172; Arbace and Ferrara, *Il Rinascimento Danzante*.

<sup>125</sup> Alemanno was perhaps responsible for painting some parts of the triptychs for Valle Castellana, as well as the *Madonna di Poggio di Bretta*, now in the Museo Diocesano, Ascoli, and the side panels

brother, Vittore, the most competent painter in his circle, other than perhaps on the altarpiece for Monte San Martino. Although, that polyptych cannot strictly be considered a collaboration, since Crivelli appears to have abandoned this commission for more prestigious opportunities in Camerino, leaving Vittore to finish it.<sup>126</sup>

## Mordant gilding, glazes and gems

Once painted, Crivelli's panels were embellished with gold, glazes and gems, transforming them into precious objects worthy of honouring the sacred beings represented. The attire of the Virgin and Child, and clerical and courtly saints is suitably scattered with gold and gems (**figs. 32, 47, 78, 91**), whereas the other saints — John the Baptist and Dominic on the first tier (**figs. 80, 82**), Francis, Andrew and Aquinas on the second (**figs. 68, 81, 84**) — were preachers and scholars, living by basic means or in poverty, and subsequently receive little or no precious embellishment. Fine, decorative gilding on top of paint is achieved either by laying leaf onto a pigmented mordant (transparent glue) applied with a brush in the desired design, and removing the excess, or with shell gold — powdered gold suspended in a binding medium.<sup>127</sup> There are conflicting reports about which technique Crivelli used, and where. In most cases, a mordant can be seen where gold has partially deteriorated, but where passages of gilding on the same panel deteriorate differently, two different techniques may have been used. For example, the mordant gilding on the foliage curling around the sun and the moon on each side of the throne in the Brera *Coronation* has partially deteriorated, revealing the brown mordant underneath, whereas the gold over the blue leaves at the root of each cornucopia are perfectly intact, suggesting that shell gold may have been used (**fig. 127**). Moreover, the question of how Crivelli would have seen where to apply a transparent mordant over dark paint remains mysterious,<sup>128</sup> suggesting either that he added a small

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from an altarpiece now in the Accademia, Venice, which I believe could once have formed a single altarpiece. Both the panels in Venice and the *Madonna di Poggio di Bretta* were made for modest churches in the environs of Ascoli, suggested by the fact that Giacomo della Marca and Saint Emidius are both depicted. On the red ground, see Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 159-162. Stylistically, they are also cruder than Carlo's best works: the broader facial features and less sophisticated modelling recall the work of Alemanno. Alemanno based his Madonna now in the Pinacoteca Civica of Montefortino on the *Madonna di Poggio di Bretta* (Papetti and Di Provvido, *Pietro Alemanno*, 92-5). It is possible that he was inspired to do so after having been partly responsible for executing the painting now attributed to Carlo.

<sup>126</sup> Alessandro Delpriori, "Carlo e Vittore Crivelli. Polittico," in Coltrinari and Delpriori, *Vittore Crivelli*, 184-5, cat. 42.

<sup>127</sup> Cennini, *Il Libro dell'Arte*, 206-8, chaps. 174-5; 218-19, chaps. 187-8.

<sup>128</sup> As noted in conversation with Emanuela Daffra.

quantity of an opaque pigment, like lead white, to the mordant, making it visible against the dark paint, or that he used shell gold. For the most part, Crivelli used mordant gilding or shell gold to depict gold-thread patterns in textiles and to line the edges of gowns and mantles (**fig. 60**). However, he also used it to indicate highlights on objects such as vessels (**fig. 94**), and to represent holy light, such as the rays emanating from miniature churches held by saints (**fig. 128**). Relief elements, including *pastiglia* halos, cord and wooden additions, are mordant gilded (**fig. 112**). For swords or other attributes in relief, Crivelli often used silver leaf, such as for the dagger and the handle of the sword penetrating Peter Martyr from the smaller altarpiece for San Domenico (**fig. 129**), and the raised ribs on the domed roof of the church held by Saint Jerome (**fig. 128**), though it has tarnished and now appears dark. He also used silver leaf over the imitation pearls, discussed below.

Crivelli often applied a darker glaze over metal leaf to suggest three-dimensionality.<sup>129</sup> He did so in the folds of the mordant-gilded pomegranate pattern on Saint Peter's cope, whereas at the highlights, the gold leaf was left bare (**fig. 118**). Together with the painted folds, which utilise the white ground as the highlight, the technique achieves an astonishing sense of three-dimensionality and palpably evokes the richness of red silk woven with gold thread. In some cases, it would appear that a coloured glaze was applied to gilded areas either to temper its reflection or to differentiate it from other gilded areas. For example, the gold halos of the *Lamentation* in New York believed to belong to the high altarpiece for San Domenico stand out as warmer in tone than the tooled gold grounds against which they are seen, although this may be partly due to the fact that some of the leaf has worn away, revealing the vermilion-tinted *pastiglia* beneath (**fig. 72**).

On the exposed gesso at the edges of the gold ground on both altarpieces for San Domenico, a translucent, dark-brown substance, distinct from the bole, extends beyond the water gilding (**fig. 99**). It is hard to know whether this is an original layer to temper the gold leaf, or a later coating. Fabio Piacentini identified a natural resin varnish made of mastic extending beyond the painted areas of Crivelli's *Pietà* in the Vatican (c.1489), used to "unify the brilliance of the pictorial surface."<sup>130</sup> According to Piacentini, the original natural resin varnishes used by Crivelli, which discolour with time, have been misinterpreted by conservators as being pigmented varnishes that act as a "patination" to give his paintings a warm tonality, which would absurdly counteract the luminous effects he had worked hard to

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<sup>129</sup> Pocobene, "Carlo Crivelli's *St. George Slaying the Dragon*," 139.

<sup>130</sup> Piacentini, "Il Restauro della *Pietà* di Carlo Crivelli," 350.

achieve.<sup>131</sup> An original varnish was detected on the painted areas only of *Christ Supported by Angels* by conservators at the National Gallery, London (c.1470-3; **fig. 130**).<sup>132</sup> The panels of the altarpieces for San Domenico were not examined under ultraviolet illumination during the 2017 examinations, but if Crivelli followed Cennino's advice by leaving the gold ground unvarnished, as he did for the *Dead Christ*, then the dark translucent layer extending beyond the leaf onto the exposed gesso grounds of the San Domenico panels cannot be varnish. It is possible that the dark layer was added during the nineteenth-century restoration, when areas of the gold ground were covered with bronze paint, perhaps to unify this new restoration with the original gold surface. However, differentiating the water-gilded ground from the mordant-gilded passages, the halos especially, would be perfectly in keeping with Crivelli's interest in conveying subtle effects of three-dimensionality. Indeed, this darker coating actually makes the halos project from the gold ground, enhancing the illusion that the figures are distinct entities from the picture surface. It may, therefore, be original, although further analysis would be necessary to confirm this.

Imbedding various 'gems' into the panels of both altarpieces for San Domenico was perhaps Crivelli's final task; mounting the panels in their frames would have been carried out by the carpenters who made the frames and panels. Conservators and art historians alike have taken little notice of Crivelli's 'gems.' However, they are a distinctive aspect of his art, and would have impacted significantly upon how his work was received by his original audiences.<sup>133</sup> The use of gems in easel painting was not standard practice in the late medieval and early modern period, but nor was it highly unusual. The technique was prevalent in Siena during the fourteenth century, an example of which is Paolo di Giovanni Fei's *Madonna and Child* (**fig. 131**), while in the fifteenth century, it occurred most frequently in Northern Italy, such as Michelino da Besozzo's *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine with Saints John the Baptist and Anthony Abbot* (**fig. 132**), with indentations in the panel where gems would have once been. Perhaps due to the widespread loss of these fragile additions, very little has been written about the phenomenon in painting,<sup>134</sup> despite the presence of

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* On the misinterpreted patina Piacentini refers to, see Casavecchia, "La tecnica di Carlo Crivelli," 13.

<sup>132</sup> Jill Dunkerton and Raymond White, "The Discovery and Identification of an Original Varnish," *National Gallery Technical Bulletin* 21 (2000): 70-76.

<sup>133</sup> See Ch. One, 41-3; Ch. Four, 134-5, 139-143; Ch. Six, 198-201.

<sup>134</sup> For the most comprehensive analysis to date of an example of gems in easel painting, see the essays in Paul Binski and Ann Massing, eds., *The Westminster Retable: History, Technique, Conservation* (London and Turnhout: Brepols publishers, 2009). On the facture of gems in the Early Modern Period, see Joanna Whalley, "Smoke and Mirrors: the Enhancement and Simulation of Gemstones in Renaissance Europe," in *The Renaissance Workshop*, eds. David Saunders, Marika Spring and Andrew Meek (London: Archetype Publications, 2013), 79-89; Marjolijn Bol, "Coloring Topaz,

such examples, the fact that coloured glass stones are mentioned by Cennino,<sup>135</sup> and that recipes for imitation gems appear in treatises of the period.<sup>136</sup> Coloured glass and imitation gems known as ‘*verselli*’ were produced on the Venetian island of Murano in the fifteenth century, the location of the Vivarini workshop which Crivelli is believed to have frequented.<sup>137</sup> It was perhaps from Murano that the goldsmith Gioacchino Malagonella, acting on behalf of Gentile da Fabriano, sourced imitation gems (“*petre contrafate*”) and enamels (“*smalti*”) for Gentile’s lost frescoes in the Cappella del Broletto in Brescia in 1417.<sup>138</sup> Pamela Buttus suggested that Gentile’s frescoes in the Palazzo Ducale must have brought these multi-media techniques to Venetian painting.<sup>139</sup> Although these frescoes are now also lost, their precious effects, with *pastiglia*, gems and extensive gilding, are likely to have resembled his *Adoration of the Magi* (fig. 133) and Pisanello’s (c.1395-c.1455) damaged frescoes in the Church of Sant’Anatasia, Verona (fig. 134).<sup>140</sup>

Although macro XRF scanning carried out on the National Gallery panels during the 2017 examinations, and the particular cut of the gems, led National Gallery scientists to conclude that all of the glass gems evoking coloured, precious stones are more recent additions,<sup>141</sup> it is possible that some or all of the original gems would have been of a precious

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Crystal and Moonstone: The Making and Meaning of Factitious Gems, 300-1500,” in *Fakes?!: Hoaxes, Counterfeits and Deception in Early Modern Science*, eds. Marco Beretta and Maria Conforti (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications: 2014), 108-129.

<sup>135</sup> Cennini, *Il Libro dell’Arte*, 160, Ch. 124, n. 3.

<sup>136</sup> Anon, “Bolognese Manuscript of the fifteenth century,” trans. Mary P. Merrifield, *Original Treatises on the Arts of Painting*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1849), 506-12.

<sup>137</sup> On “*verselli*”, see Luigi Zecchin, *Vetro e vetrai di Murano*, vol. 1 (Venice: Arsenale Edizioni, 1987), 153-56.

<sup>138</sup> Matteo Mazzalupi, “Regestro” in *Gentile da Fabriano: Studi e ricerche*, eds. Andrea De Marchi, Laura Laureati, and Lorenza Mochi Onori (Milan: Mondadori Electa, 2006), 75.

<sup>139</sup> Pamela Buttus, “Sperimentazioni luministiche e geometrie variabili nelle incisioni dell’oro tra Niccolò di Pietro e Jacobello del Fiore,” in “Rabeschi d’oro: Pittura e oreficeria a Venezia in età gotica,” eds. Cristina Guarnieri and Andrea De Marchi, special issue, *Arte Veneta* 71 (2014): 169, n. 29.

<sup>140</sup> Maria Elisa Avagnina, “La tecnica pittorica di Pisanello attraverso le fonti e l’analisi delle opere veronesi,” in *Pisanello*, ed. Paula Marini (Milan: Electa, 1996), exhibition catalogue, Museo di Castelvecchio, Verona, 471-2.

<sup>141</sup> Lead glass, which was not in wide use during the fifteenth century, was identified. Howard, Spring and Billinge, internal report on analysis of NG788. However, it should be noted that recipes for lead glass are found in a Tuscan treatise of the fifteenth century, as well as a recipe books from the glass-making island of Murano, Venice, dating to the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. See Cesare Moretti, Carlo Stefano Salerno and Sabina Tommasi Ferroni, *Ricette Vetrarie Muranesi: Gasparo Brunoro e il Manoscritto di Danzica* (Florence: Nardini, 2004), 28. Joanna Whalley, Senior Metals Conservator and Gemmologist at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, concluded that the ‘brilliant’ cut of some of the gems dates them to the seventeenth century at the earliest, when this cut began to be used. I want to thank Joanna for sharing her observations. The gems were perhaps added when the panels entered Prince Demidoff’s collection in the mid-nineteenth century. See p.66, n. 15.

nature.<sup>142</sup> The only original gem on a panel by Crivelli, which acts as a brooch clasping the Virgin's mantle in the 1482 San Domenico triptych, was found to be a topaz (**fig. 26**).<sup>143</sup> Real stones may, therefore, have been combined with glass gems and imitation pearls, as was often the case with medieval reliquaries and vestments.<sup>144</sup> Moreover, the fact that Cennino recommends sticking "certain *precious* stones" onto the clothes of God the Father or the Virgin, as well as informing the reader that there exists "*glass* stones in many colours" for such purposes, within the same paragraph, may be more than just casual indifference to his terminology.<sup>145</sup> Perhaps both fictive and precious stones were used, depending on the importance of the figure receiving them; imitation gems were presumably decorative and for visual impact, while precious stones may have been included for their apotropaic function or as a way of honouring the sacred being represented. However, Cennino's indifference might also imply that artists and viewers did not readily distinguish between precious and imitation gems. According to Caroline Walker Bynum, "although [painters] sometimes used imitation gems in place of precious ones [. . .] the gold or crystal or faux ruby is to be encountered as such, not as a painterly illusion."<sup>146</sup> Whether glass or precious, Crivelli's gems would probably have been shaped as cabochons, like his painted ones and the topaz on the Brera Madonna. Indeed, there are oval marks, possibly the remnants of glue, on the gold leaf just above the purple gem at the centre of the Madonna's necklace of the larger altarpiece, and the blue gem on Michael's headpiece in the smaller altarpiece, probably where original cabochons once were.

The authenticity and facture of the imitation pearls that cover both altarpieces are hard to judge (**fig. 135**). Macro XRF scanning revealed the presence of silver leaf, which has now tarnished, but the material of the core was not determined.<sup>147</sup> They are possibly balls of gesso rolled by hand, since they are more oval than circular, some with small peaks. The x-radiographs suggest that they were imbedded into the panel with an internal rod. The x-radiograph of Saint Catherine from the larger altarpiece revealed that the three uppermost pearls on her tiara absorb X-rays, while the others do not. This difference may imply the presence of pearls from a more recent restoration campaign, possibly during the nineteenth

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<sup>142</sup> On the possibility that the gems of the altarpiece for Ascoli's cathedral were precious, see Ch. One, 41-3.

<sup>143</sup> Scatragli, "Il Polittico di Carlo Crivelli per San Domenico," 482.

<sup>144</sup> Zecchin, *Vetro e vetrai di Murano*, 1:155; Margaret E. Frazer, "The panel with half-figure of St Michael," in *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice*, ed. David Buckton (Milan: Olivetti, 1984), exhibition catalogue, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 141.

<sup>145</sup> Cennini, *Il Libro dell'Arte*, 160, Ch. 124.

<sup>146</sup> Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 53.

<sup>147</sup> Howard, Spring and Billinge, internal report on analysis of NG788.

century. As archival material on the restoration of the *San Domenico Triptych* in the Brera shows, restorers in the nineteenth century were adept at making “*perle di Roma*” using ingredients such as fish scales and snail slime, which are listed in Quattrocento recipes for making imitation pearls.<sup>148</sup> However, the central panel of the smaller altarpiece now in Budapest, which has a different collecting history from the panels of the so-called *Demidoff Altarpiece* in the National Gallery and thus also a different restoration history, has the same large, tarnished imitation pearls as those on the larger altarpiece (**fig. 75**). This may suggest that they are original and do not derive from the same moment as the later glass gems. Moreover, in the larger altarpiece, there is a parity between the three-dimensional pearls at the Virgin’s neckline and the painted pearls that continue down the edge of her pink mantle, which are exactly the same size and spaced at the same width (**fig. 78**). This parity between paint and relief may suggest that, unlike the coloured glass gems, the imitation pearls are original, since the intention was clearly to blur the distinction between painted and real. Saint Lucy from the smaller altarpiece has a necklace of three-dimensional ‘pearls’ and just above is a string of painted pearls of the same size woven through her hair (**fig. 135**). The luminosity of the painted pearls offers a sense of how Crivelli’s tarnished imitation pearls would have once looked; when of the same pearlescent colour as the painted ones, they must have been difficult to tell apart.

## Conclusion

In the introduction to their edited volume, *The Craft of Art: Originality and Industry in the Renaissance and Baroque Workshop*, Andrew Ladis and Carolyn Woods observed,

the creative idea for an image sometimes sprang full-borne from the Olympian mind of a uniquely gifted artist, but on some occasions it arose from humble, even pedestrian, external circumstances. In such instances the originality of a work of art perhaps depended more upon the artist’s singularly skilled hands, capable of recasting a borrowed concept, than upon the concept itself.<sup>149</sup>

This is an especially useful way of approaching Crivelli’s artistic practice. Perhaps more than other painters, his creative impulses seem to have thrived within the boundaries of external circumstances. He made a virtue of repetitive subject matter, developing a recognisable

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<sup>148</sup> Daffra, “Trittico di San Domenico,” 294.

<sup>149</sup> Ladis and Wood eds., *The Craft of Art: Originality and Industry in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque Workshop* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press), 1.

vocabulary that he tempered to the requirements of each commission, and he formulated an ornamental register that shifted according to a format that was more often than not chosen by the patron. Crivelli pushed the conventions of tempera painting to their limit, making hatched paint and the hard panel surface a distinct aspect of his visual language. His highly personal sense of line and virtuoso manipulation of materials, which emphasise facture and the 'made' nature of his paintings, are central components of his distinctive style.

When Crivelli moved to Fabriano in 1490 to take up the commission for the *Coronation* at the convent of San Francesco, he was described as "*domino Carulo Crivello veneto depictori optimo et aurato militia*" – "Lord Carlo Crivelli of Venice, excellent painter and Knight of the Golden Militia."<sup>150</sup> That two-year period in Fabriano saw a flood of commissions for altarpieces from the recently knighted painter who would, a few months following the 1490 contract, be named a *familiaris* of prince Ferdinand of Capua.<sup>151</sup> The way in which Crivelli organised his production, successfully working on multiple projects simultaneously, speaks of his entrepreneurial outlook. Whilst based in Fabriano in the house paid for by his new patrons, he took on the *sacra conversazione* dated 1491 paid for by Oradea di Giovanni Becchetti, also destined for the Church of San Francesco (now National Gallery, London), and in the same year he agreed to paint another *sacra conversazione* for the Franciscans of nearby Matelica, which he was still working on in June 1494 (**fig. 96**). In 1492 he dated the *Immaculate Conception*, commissioned by the Franciscans of nearby Pergola (**fig. 67**), a year later signing the *Coronation* for the Franciscans of Fabriano (**figs. 92, 119**).

Crivelli was running a busy workshop and must have delegated specific tasks to different *garzoni* in order to take on so much work whilst ensuring a smooth and efficient operation. However, the hands of his assistants are not readily betrayed with close visual scrutiny of these late altarpieces. Crivelli must have been responsible for their design, applying the frenzied and often pictorial *pastiglia*, and painting all but expansive non-figural passages, such as drapery. Crivelli must also have executed mordant gilding, which is, like his *pastiglia*, descriptive and often carries meaning. As laid out in this chapter, the practical tasks of preparing panels, pricking cartoons, applying pouncing dust and joining the dots of *spolvere* would have largely been carried out by the workshop. His assistants may also have applied water gilding, and were perhaps responsible for punchwork. We saw that the tooling in the gold ground of the altarpieces for San Domenico perfectly follow the incised outlines

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<sup>150</sup> Coltrinari, "Regesto," 197, doc. 133.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 197, doc. 134.

of the design, which speaks of the diligent work of an assistant. As his fame and commissions increased, Crivelli developed a work flow that enabled other artisans to participate, as we saw with the transition in his underdrawings from a freehand sketch to the use of a cartoon. Their interventions must have been carefully monitored to ensure they meshed imperceptibly with the passages Crivelli personally executed. As we have seen, altarpieces of lesser importance, for which he was paid much less, must have been executed either in part or entirely by the workshop to his design and under his supervision.

Although this chapter sheds light on Crivelli's artistic practice as a whole, it has focused particularly on the materials and techniques of his mixed-media polypytychs, drawing upon the results of recent examinations at the National Gallery in London. It offers a basis for understanding Crivelli's visual effects, such as his gems and gilding, and how these may have appeared originally. An understanding of condition is critical to the interpretations of Crivelli's work advanced elsewhere in this thesis. By investigating the making of Crivelli's altarpieces, from carpentry to the final embellishments, this chapter provides a clear picture of the Venetian's rigorous methods. It offers, for the first time, an account of Crivelli's workshop operations. Given that there is little archival evidence relating to Crivelli's activities, a methodology that combines the material evidence of his pictures enables us to move forward in our understanding of his work. Crivelli was a highly self-conscious artist, whose paintings constantly draw the viewer's attention to their facture, both through his incessant signatures and via his virtuosity. In claiming responsibility for the artistry so emphatically demonstrated in his work, Crivelli asked his viewers to acknowledge his creative labours.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Transcending the Physical: The Role of Relief**

Crivelli's use of relief is a distinctive aspect of his practice. At a time when artists were experimenting with illusion using purely painterly means, Crivelli was applying three-dimensional matter to the picture surface as way of incorporating aspects of the real into his representations. Far from naïve, Crivelli's use of relief gestures towards multiple realms: the viewer's reality, the picture's fiction and the divine 'beyond'. This thesis has already explored the Venetian artist's relief from several angles: Chapter One examined how Crivelli's three-dimensional ornament enabled him to simulate the material qualities of prestigious craft objects in Ascoli, posing a commentary about the line between craft and artistry, material and illusion. Chapter Two considered the function of relief in Dominican devotion, in which *imagines agens* invited the viewer to contemplate the sacred subject. Chapter Three investigated the origins of relief in painting, and the techniques of Crivelli's *pastiglia* and his gems.

This chapter continues to probe at the ways in which the application of three-dimensional elements to a painted surface affects how the viewer perceives the image. I will consider the optical system it implements; its resemblance to jewellery adorning a sculpture or person; its function as a protective sheath for the Virgin when applied to her entire mantle; and its use to render halos. In each case, the interplay between relief and paint offers a commentary upon the dichotomies of material and immaterial. The first part of this chapter argues that Crivelli's relief employs a unique system, which demonstrates both his knowledge of optics and an interest in subverting representational norms. In the second part, I consider the various associations that the application of relief may have triggered, proposing connections with specific artistic traditions, devotional practices and theological principles.

#### **Parodying renaissance illusion**

Recent scholarship has challenged the idea that fifteenth-century artists, particularly those depicting religious subjects, applied perspective or any other naturalistic device 'to the book,' but adapted scientific findings for their purposes.<sup>1</sup> Hellmut Wohl argued that Alberti's

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Joost Joustra, "Pictorial Space and Sacred Subject Matter in Florentine Painting 1425-1466" (PhD thesis., The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 2016).

famous comparison of the picture as a 'window' was meant not literally but as a "metaphor for the fictive properties and capabilities of painting."<sup>2</sup> The work of Dominique Raynaud demonstrates that no work of art of the fifteenth-century, not even Masaccio's *Trinity* (c.1426-1428, Santa Maria Novella, Florence), employs single-point perspective systematically, and that the science of optics and perspective was still inexact and heavily influenced by experiments dating to the Duecento.<sup>3</sup> While many artists in Crivelli's day and prior appear to have taken an interest in adopting scientific findings, using their artistic media to create of fictional worlds remained a primary concern, particularly when the aim was to encourage the viewer to reflect upon the invisible.

Painters in Florence often subverted natural norms by staging spatial scenarios that would be impossible beyond a painted realm, such as Filippo Lippi's *Bartolini Tondo* (late 1460s), which has multiple vanishing points and figural groups that appear separate despite ostensibly occupying the same space (**fig. 136**).<sup>4</sup> The practice of combining sculpted and painted figures in the same altarpiece consciously maintains the fictional status of the image by denying the illusion of figures depicted in either media (**fig. 4**).<sup>5</sup> The very technique of low relief sculpture participates in a similar denial of illusion, with examples such as Donatello's *Pazzi Madonna* (1425-30) producing an ambivalent tension between pictorial image and three-dimensional object (**fig. 137**).<sup>6</sup> The combination of flatness and relief in a single work could also function as a play on different physical realms: in the *Chiarito Tabernacle* by Pacino di Bonaguida, 1340s (**fig. 138**), the central panel of *Christ's Transfiguration among the Apostles* is rendered entirely in gilt *pastiglia*, situating the scene as a metaphysical apparition compared to the historical events depicted in paint in the flanking panels.<sup>7</sup>

By hinting at an invisible reality, artists were implicitly defining the distinction between their image and the divine prototype. Theologians had long cautioned on the dangers of conflating the two; philosophers including Thomas Aquinas approved the use of images but recommended that the viewer approach them differently from how they worship God. In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas wrote, "there is a two-fold movement of the mind

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<sup>2</sup> Hellmut Wohl, *The Aesthetics of Italian Renaissance Art: A Reconsideration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 97.

<sup>3</sup> Dominique Raynaud, "Optics and Perspective prior to Alberti," in *The Springtime of the Renaissance. Sculpture and the Arts in Florence, 1400-60*, eds. Beatrice Paolozzi Strozzi and Marc Bormand (Florence: Madragora, 2013), exhibition catalogue, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 165-171.

<sup>4</sup> Joustra, "Pictorial Space," 196-203.

<sup>5</sup> On these combined altarpieces in the Italian renaissance, see Wenderholm, *Bild und Berührung*.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Blake McHam, "Now and Then: Recovering a sense of different values" in Cooper and Leino, *Depth of Field*, 344-5.

<sup>7</sup> Krüger, "Medium and Imagination," 73-75.

towards an image: one indeed towards the image itself as a certain thing; another, towards the image in so far as it is the image of something else.”<sup>8</sup> Scholars have suggested that some artists built this ideal into their images by suppressing materiality, prompting the viewer to embark on a spiritual journey beyond the image.<sup>9</sup> This was particularly effective with the medium of monochromatic, low relief sculpture, which may have appealed to viewers seeking to move beyond corporeal contemplation towards the intellectual, imageless contemplation that was praised by theologians since Augustine and Gregory the Great.<sup>10</sup>

My contention is that Crivelli’s use of relief participates in a similar denial of illusion, providing a commentary upon the nature of pictorial representation and its relationship to the divine referent. Historically, however, it has been seen as a sign of his backward approach and the conservative taste of his patrons in the Marche.<sup>11</sup> Gentile da Fabriano and Pisanello’s lost wall paintings in the Palazzo Ducale (1420s) would have glittered with gilt ornaments in relief, shaping a taste for similar inserts in panel painting of the first half of the fifteenth century, which reached its climax in the mixed-media polyptychs produced by the Vivarini Workshop for the Cappella di San Tarasio in the Church of San Zaccaria, 1443-4 (**fig. 4**).<sup>12</sup> Although Crivelli must have admired the various types of *pastiglia* employed by the previous generation of painters in Northern Italy, his use of this technique differs fundamentally from his predecessors, who seem mostly to have been interested in the precious effects it produced.

It was not until 1965 that Crivelli’s visual and material dialectics were acknowledged for the first time. In her article on “meta-trompe-l’oeil” in twentieth-century modernism, Suzi Gablik compared Crivelli’s Brera *Triptych* (**fig. 20**), highlighting Saint Peter’s three-dimensional keys, with works such as Robert Rauschenberg’s “combine” paintings which incorporate “certain objects of the phenomenal world into the pictorial illusion.”<sup>13</sup> She suggested that both examples go one step further than traditional *trompe-l’oeil* devices, becoming “meta-trompe-l’oeils,” as they not only hint at but actually enter the domain of the real. Over twenty years later, Jonathan Watkins took the matter up again. Watkins

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 207.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Dent, “Contemplative Relief: Meditating on Christ through Sculptural Form in Early Trecento Italy,” in *Depth of Field*, 41-69; Alison Wright, “‘Touch the truth’? Desiderio da Settignano, Renaissance relief and the body of Christ,” *Sculpture Journal* 21, no. 1 (2012): 7-25.

<sup>10</sup> Geraldine Johnson, “Art or Artefact? Madonna and Child Reliefs in the Early Renaissance,” in *The Sculpted Object 1400-1700*, eds. Stuart Currie and Peta Motture (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 1997), 5-7.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Davies, *Carlo Crivelli*, 20; Lightbown, 266.

<sup>12</sup> Buttas, “Sperimentazioni luministiche,” 169; n. 29.

<sup>13</sup> Gablik, “Meta-trompe-l’oeil,” *Art News* 64 (1965): 46-9.

described Crivelli's relief as a "highly original and complex epistemological statement," observing that "real three-dimensional objects inevitably undermine the illusion created by the [painted] representation of three-dimensional objects with which they are combined."<sup>14</sup> Only in very recent years have scholars of early modern art begun to grapple with Crivelli's complex epistemological statement, assigning it wide-ranging functions.<sup>15</sup> For example, discussing the Magdalene's ornate *pastiglia* sleeve in the Boston *Pietà* (**fig. 38**), Martina Bagnoli described relief as a "touchstone against which the illusionism of Crivelli's painted surfaces can be measured."<sup>16</sup> Turning Watkins's theory on its head, for Bagnoli the relief "anchors the validity of Crivelli's illusionism and establishes the strength of Crivelli's craft as a painter of reality."<sup>17</sup> While for Watkins, Crivelli's relief undermines painted illusion, for Bagnoli, it asserts it.

This opposition indicates something fundamental about the operation of Crivelli's dialectical system of representation, which is that there is no firm boundary between the real and the unreal in his work. This tension is manifest in the interaction between the second and third dimension, which appear to operate as one. During the technical examinations performed at the National Gallery in 2017, it became clear when viewing the panels under studio conditions that the thickness of relief changes depending on its relationship to painted volume. Thus, paint and relief articulate the same pictorial volume: relief diminishes as it follows the painted body out of sight, and gems are seen closer together as they follow the body around, disappearing from view. In other words, Crivelli's relief is not applied to the surface for purely ornamental reasons, but plays an optical role in the image.

This unusual effect in Crivelli's work has been ignored in the scholarship to date, perhaps as it is not easily discerned in photographic images. In the high altarpiece for San Domenico in Ascoli (**fig. 24**), Saint Peter's mose is more built up on the left-hand side, making its right-hand side appear further away, turning with the angle of Saint Peter's body

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<sup>14</sup> Watkins, "Untricking the Eye," 56.

<sup>15</sup> See Ch. Two, 93-4; Peta Motture built on the ideas of Gablik and Watkins, noting that relief flattens painted form, creating a tension between real and fictive: Motture, "Agostino di Duccio and Carlo Crivelli: Playing with Two and Three Dimensions," in Cooper and Leino, *Depth of Field*, 149-67. Golsenne traces the origins of relief in Venice and the northern Italian courts, assigning it with the role not only of an ex-voto, but of conveying "social prestige, religious dignity and sacred power." *Carlo Crivelli*, 106-8, 146-7. Like Golsenne, Alison Wright sees Crivelli's relief elements as asserting power through material magnificence, as well as giving physical presence to saints and objects imitating goldsmith work. Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 61-2; 69-70.

<sup>16</sup> Martina Bagnoli, "Mary's Measure: Touch and Taste in Carlo Crivelli's Boston Lamentation," in *Les Cinq Sens au Moyen Âge*, ed. Éric Palazzo (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2016), 733.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

(fig. 48). The cord on his orphrey transitions from real cord to a *pastiglia* imitation on his receding left side, becoming progressively smaller as it curves around his cope out of view (fig. 47). It would have been impossible for a real piece of cord to become smaller, hence Crivelli's decision to switch to *pastiglia*. As Peter's painted volume disappears from view, this *pastiglia* cord continues very slightly beyond the paint onto the gold ground, so that it appears proud of the rest of the cope (fig. 139). This can also be seen on to the left of the panel where the real rope extends just beyond Peter's right shoulder, overlapping the gold ground as it appears to follow the body around and out of sight. Similarly, the Virgin's brooch is raised very slightly on the right-hand side so that it appears closer to the viewer. The *pastiglia* motif at its edge is slightly broader on the right than on the left, and the imitation pearls are spaced further apart on the right, making it appear closer (fig. 140).

Although the coloured gems and imitative pearls do not decrease in size on the larger altarpiece as they 'recede' around the painted figure,<sup>18</sup> their spacing follows pictorial rules. The coloured gems are spaced closer together the further painted volume recedes from the viewer, seen, for example, on Peter's mitre (fig. 141). Similarly, the imitative pearls that line the Virgin's and Catherine's necklines are spaced closer together the further they recede over the body (fig. 140). On the smaller altarpiece for San Domenico, made several years later in c.1479, Crivelli devised a new solution for receding jewels. Rather than fabricate them separately and insert them into the wooden panel like a gem, he simply applied *pastiglia* to the surface, which he could mould to be smaller and more oval as they recede around painted volume, thus further enhancing the illusion that the saints are adorned with real jewels. This technique was used for the pearls around the Christ child's head and Lucy's necklace, but is most clearly seen in Michael's headpiece, which adorns his foreshortened and neatly parted head of hair (fig. 142). These small, almost imperceptible spatial modulations stake a claim for the real presence of the holy figures represented, but they also expose the fabricated nature of the illusion.

The behaviour of Crivelli's relief shares its complexity with low relief sculpture, which uses the third dimension to convey a pictorial image.<sup>19</sup> This almost paradoxical way of using three-dimensional matter may have been informed by Crivelli's experience in Padua, where he frequented Squarcione's circle. It is known that in his *studium*, Squarcione assembled sculptural reliefs, both recent works as well as ancient fragments, and it is likely that his

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<sup>18</sup> This may support the hypothesis that they are later replacements. See Ch. Three, 126-8.

<sup>19</sup> For a comparison between Crivelli's work and the relief sculptures of Agostino di Duccio, see Motture, "Agostino di Duccio and Carlo Crivelli," 149-67.

apprentices made gesso casts of the Madonna and Child to paint and sell.<sup>20</sup> Hugo Chapman suggested that this experience can be felt in the plastic treatment of form in Marco Zoppo's early paintings, and the same can be said of Crivelli's interest in the third dimension.<sup>21</sup> In fact, Crivelli merges a Paduan focus on the mechanism of relief sculpture with the Venetian tradition of ornamental gilt relief in painting, as seen in the work of the previous generation. However, unlike Crivelli's relief, which interacts spatially with paint, the relief of the previous generation is applied to the panel without these spatial considerations. Of these painters, undoubtedly the most skilled and complex use of relief was employed by the Vivarini partners, with whom Crivelli probably trained, seen particularly in their treatment of *pastiglia* in the *Charity Triptych* (**fig. 5**). However, *pastiglia* is less emphatic and follows a detailed, foreshortened underdrawing. Due to this, it does have a dimensional function, but, unlike in Crivelli's practice, the quantity of this *pastiglia* is always the same regardless of the distance it is meant to appear from the viewer. So for the depiction of the processional cross held by Saint Gregory, which is seen markedly in perspective, the *pastiglia* is just as thick at the end supposedly furthest away as it is at the end closest to the viewer, which limits the viewer's perception of it as a three-dimensional object in space (**fig. 143**).

I would, therefore, argue that Crivelli pursued the dimensional possibilities of *pastiglia* and other types of relief to a greater degree than any other painter of the fifteenth century. Moreover, he appears to have been the only painter that modulated the thickness of relief depending on its relationship to painted volume. The hallmark of renaissance painting is often described as the application of scientific methods to render pictorial space, so that the optical experience of reality is reconstructed on a flat surface. Linear perspective, as codified by Alberti, and the introduction of oil painting, which enabled soft tonal transitions, making painted form project in relief, are highlighted as the main examples of this development. However, it seems that Crivelli's treatment of relief, whose spatial manipulation is almost imperceptible, also demonstrates the application of an optical system.

Recent scholarship has advocated for perspective as a broad concept in the early

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<sup>20</sup> Irene Favaretto, "La raccolta di sculture antiche di Francesco Squarçione tra leggendo e realtà," in De Nicolò, *Francesco Squarçione*, 233-244; Eckart Marchand, "Reproducing Relief: The Use and Status of Plaster Casts in the Italian Renaissance" in Cooper and Leino, *Depth of Field*, 191 – 221; Andrea De Marchi, "Centralità di Padova: Alcuni esempi di interferenza tra scultura e pittura nell'area adriatica alla metà del Quattrocento" in *Quattrocento Adriatico: Fifteenth-century art of the Adriatic rim*, ed. Charles Dempsey (Bologna: Nuova Alfa Editoriale and Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 69-71.

<sup>21</sup> Chapman, "An Early Drawing by Marco Zoppo," in De Nicolò Salmazo, *Francesco Squarçione*, 210.

modern world, with its origins in medieval optical theories.<sup>22</sup> For example, Christopher Lakey argues that linear perspective in painting in fact developed from similar concerns in relief sculpture that stem from the Duecento, exemplified by the work of Nicola (c.1220/5-c.1284) and Giovanni Pisano (c.1250-c.1315).<sup>23</sup> Various techniques were employed by painters and sculptors to make figure project from ground, including optical corrections, which distorted form to enable legibility from a particular viewpoint, and multiple vanishing points.<sup>24</sup> Crivelli's combination of foreshortened paint and actual relief demonstrates an interest in visual perception and the various methods available to artists for manipulating it. While *The Annunciation with Saint Emidius* successfully implements linear perspective (**fig. 2**), his mixed-media polyptychs arguably employ a different form of perspective that may also have been based on scientific principles.

The theories of Giovanni da Fontana (c.1396-c.1455), an engineer who attended the University of Padua and was associated with the painter Jacopo Bellini — whose sketchbooks Crivelli knew — suggest that Venetian conceptions of pictorial space differed from Tuscan principles.<sup>25</sup> In his *Tractatus* on perspective (1454), Giovanni referred to

“a little book dedicated to the outstanding Venetian painter Jacopo Bellini, showing in what ways it should be known how to apply bright and dark colours, with a system such that not only the parts of a single image painted onto a surface should seem in relief, but also such that when they are looked at they should be believed to be putting a hand or foot outward, or that they might seem miles away from the men and animals and mountains also placed on the same surface.”<sup>26</sup>

Giovanni da Fontana's theory for constructing relief and space on a flat surface was not based on linear means, but rather on the modulation of light and colour. As well as this theoretical backdrop, artists in Venice had as their most authoritative model for depicting sacred space the mosaics covering the vaulted ceilings of the Basilica of San Marco, whose gilt tesserae surfaces produced optical effects that painters tried to capture both in Crivelli's time and beyond.

Crivelli's system, which is also based on the effects of colour, real light and shadow

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<sup>22</sup> Sven Dupré, ed., *Perspective as Practice: Renaissance Cultures of Optics*. Techne. Knowledge, Technique, and Material Culture (Turnhout: Brepols 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Lakey, *Sculptural Seeing*.

<sup>24</sup> For example, see Robert Munman, *Optical Corrections in the Sculpture of Donatello* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Giordana Mariani Canova, “Riflessioni su Jacopo Bellini e sul libro dei disegni del Louvre,” *Arte Veneta* 26 (1972): 9-30. See also Paul Hills, “The Venetian Optics of Light and Geometry of Proportion,” in Dupré, *Perspective as Practice*, 409-27. Hills demonstrates that the relationship between geometry and light in Venetian painting differs from what is seen in Central Italian art of the same period. On Crivelli's knowledge of Jacopo's sketchbooks, see Ch. One, 32.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Creighton E. Gilbert, *Italian Art 1400-1550. Sources and Documents* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press), 175.

— produced both by reflective gold and the three-dimensional picture surface — must be seen in relation to these theoretical and artistic models, although his merging of pictorial and sculptural foreshortening is highly novel and not without irony. Barbara Casavecchia made the insightful observation that Crivelli’s “frenzied use of *pastiglia* becomes an opportunity for a deliberate parody of Renaissance illusionism,” though she did not explain how.<sup>27</sup> Crivelli’s *pastiglia* parodies renaissance illusion in several ways. The virtuosity with which *pastiglia* is employed, making objects entirely rendered with the technique become works of relief sculpture rather than painting, is in itself quite ironic. There is a sense from Cennino’s *Libro dell’Arte*, and from some Italian paintings, that *pastiglia* in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries often had a decorative function and was used for peripheral detail. Cennino stated that *pastiglia* was used for “making lovely things,”<sup>28</sup> “leaves and other handiwork in relief,”<sup>29</sup> as well as the “border of the clothing or foliate decoration [ . . .].”<sup>30</sup> Although, as in Pacino di Bonaguida’s panel (**fig. 138**), *pastiglia* could highlight the material-immaterial dichotomy of devotional paintings, as Lakey argues, it is rare to find examples before Crivelli in which the relief behaves according to painted volume.<sup>31</sup> In Michele Giambono’s work, for example, *pastiglia* sits on top of the image without offering a sense of spatial recession (**fig. 144**). Heightening the buckles of shoes, the saddles of horses and the handles of swords, the *pastiglia* in Gentile da Fabriano’s *Adoration of the Magi* (1426) promotes material splendour and, with painted hands that appear to hold or grab three-dimensional objects, offers a sense of tangibility (**fig. 133**). However, these objects are not brought to the level of detail of Crivelli’s relief, which matches his painted objects in their hyper-real refinement. Moreover, the way in which relief interacts with different types of pictorial illusion, both those integrated within the picture as well as elements in *trompe-l’oeil*, makes it part of a continuum in Crivelli’s visual system that works to activate the viewer’s optic perception.

Observing the dimensionally convincing crozier held by Saint Emidius in the Ascoli cathedral polyptych, it is clear that Crivelli’s *pastiglia* is far from peripheral decoration (**fig. 30**). The crozier is indeed ornamental, embellishing the image with elaborate, raised detail in gold, but it claims to exist as a three-dimensional object within a largely flat, pictorial field by

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<sup>27</sup> Casavecchia, “La tecnica di Carlo Crivelli,” 12. (Translated in the same issue of *Kermes*, xii.)

<sup>28</sup> Cennini, *Il Libro dell’Arte*, trans. Broecke, Ch.116, 152.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 119, 156.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, Ch. 124, 160.

<sup>31</sup> Lakey, *Sculptural Seeing*, 163-4.

the way it recedes, both physically and optically.<sup>32</sup> In Crivelli's mixed-media works, the illusion of both painted and sculptural forms cancel each other out.<sup>33</sup> The relief emphasises the flat surface of the panel, in turn denying painted illusion. Like the gourd in the *Annunciation* that seems to disrespect the rules of the image, as it 'protrudes' outwards, in the opposite direction of the receding painted scene (**fig. 2**), Crivelli's relief should be regarded as a type of *trompe-l'oeil*, transmitting visual information that temporarily confuses visual perception.<sup>34</sup> The fact that the illusion of painted volume — the ultimate goal of painting according to fifteenth-century theorists — could be exposed by a medieval technique, and a sculptural one at that, demonstrates Crivelli's wit, particularly in the light of the *paragone* debates that he would have been familiar with from his time in Padua.<sup>35</sup> Rendered using the techniques of his Trecento predecessors, Crivelli's virtuoso relief surpasses its purely decorative function, entering into a spatial dialogue with finely-wrought, painted surfaces. These surfaces alone achieve a sense of relief, and as such fulfil the theoretical goal of painting to "make forms appear markedly in relief," as outlined by Alberti, echoing Ghiberti's and Cennino's advice to painters.<sup>36</sup> Perfectly foreshortened heads (**fig. 36**), and saints' feet that protrude just beyond the parapet, seem to project from the flat surface of the picture. However, Crivelli's paintings do more than just make flat form stand out in relief; they depict actual sculptural relief in abundance, as if to make the statement that his art encompasses not only illusion of the real, but reality itself.

### Crivelli's saints as sculpted *simulacra*

Crivelli confines elements in projecting relief to polyptychs and some small devotional works; his *pale quadre* all have flat surfaces.<sup>37</sup> Relief is used for saints' attributes and accessories,

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<sup>32</sup> Wright notes that our perception of the crozier as "a perfectly foreshortened design in fictive space [ . . . ] is realizable only through the painter's convincing draughtsmanship, not the crafting of gilded plaster (*pastiglia*) of the kind admired in Italy and described in painter's recipes about 1400 for decorating 'borders.'" Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 64.

<sup>33</sup> Watkins, "Un-tricking the Eye," 56.

<sup>34</sup> See Gablik, "Meta-trompe-l'oeil," 46-9.

<sup>35</sup> See Introduction, 13.

<sup>36</sup> In 1447, Ghiberti praised a St. Thomas Aquinas painted with such skill "that appears to stand out in relief." Lorenzo Ghiberti, *The Commentaries of Lorenzo Ghiberti* (London: The Courtauld Institute of Art, 1967), 16. Cennino stated that painting with "no relief [ . . . ] will come out crude and lacking in sophistication." Cennino, *Il Libro dell'Arte*, Ch. 9, 31. Alberti commented: "If I am not mistaken, we do not ask for infinite labour from the painter, but we do expect a painting that appears markedly in relief and similar to the objects represented." Alberti, *On Painting*, 67.

<sup>37</sup> The only exception is the lunette now in the Vatican Museums that was made to go above *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter* now in Berlin (**fig. 165**). On the reasons why, See Chap. Three, 104-5; Chap. Six, 189-90, 197-8.

and it is present where figures are shown in a restricted setting, almost always against a gold ground and never in a purely painted environment. Adorned with accessories in relief and compressed into the narrow, shallow space of the niche, Crivelli's saints appear almost to break free from the picture, taking on a bodily presence that would have enhanced their potential to act as intercessors on behalf of the viewer (**fig. 46**).<sup>38</sup> They function rather as cultic statues dressed in real clothes and jewels, than as diminutive painted beings. In the fifteenth century and prior, figurative sculpture in the round was associated with pagan idols.<sup>39</sup> Sculptures are described as *simulacra* in medieval writings, whereas paintings, *imagines*, were physically removed from their prototype and therefore less threatening.<sup>40</sup> With their three-dimensional presence, sculptures and reliquaries had a higher claim on reality than painted images, and thus posed the danger of conflating image and prototype.<sup>41</sup> I argue that Crivelli's saints ask to be treated more as *simulacra* than *imagines*, and his use of relief has an important role to play in this.

As Stephen Campbell and Thomas Golsenne have observed, the application of *pastiglia* and other types of relief to Crivelli's painted figures seems to emulate the practice of adorning sacred images with ex-votos — tokens of gratitude for favours enacted by the holy being on behalf of the devotee.<sup>42</sup> While the faithful would leave candles and paper-based messages close to the sacred image, gestures that Crivelli makes reference to in paintings such as the *Madonna della Candeletta* (**fig. 94**), members of the clergy or more wealthy devotees often commissioned expensive crowns and jewellery as more permanent ex-votos following significant miracles performed by the holy personage through the object

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<sup>38</sup> On the practice of placing the figure in a compressed space in relief sculpture, and its devotional potential, see Wright, "Touch the truth," 17-18. Wright also describes the claustrophobic effect of the Ascoli Cathedral polytych, in which she says "depth is denied in an almost programmatic way." Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 63.

<sup>39</sup> Bokody, *Images-within-Images in Italian Painting*, 20; Christian Kleinbub, "Jacopo Bellini and the Drawing of Idolatry," in *Venetian Painting Matters*, ed. Jodi Cranston (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 21-34; Megan Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), 30; Hans Belting, *The Image and its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle: A.D. Caratzas, 1990), 9-12.

<sup>40</sup> Kleinbub, "Jacopo Bellini," 30.

<sup>41</sup> Hamburger, "Seeing and Believing," 53.

<sup>42</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 147-150; Campbell, "On the Importance of Carlo Crivelli," 29-30. On ex-votos and their functions more generally, see Ittai Weinryb, ed., *Ex Voto: Votive Giving Across Cultures*, Cultural Histories of the Material World (New York: Bard Graduate Centre, 2015); Megan Holmes, "Ex-votos: Materiality, Memory, and Cult," in *The Idol in the Age of Art: Objects, Devotions and the Early Modern World*, eds. Michael Wayne Cole and Rebecca Zorach (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 159-181.

in question.<sup>43</sup> For example, we know that Crivelli's *Virgin and Child with St. Francis, St. Bernardino of Siena, and the Donor Fra Bernardino Ferretti* had, at one point in its history, a votive crown, as the blue paint it once covered is darker than the paint elsewhere, which has discoloured due to light exposure, leaving a crown-shaped profile (**fig. 145**).<sup>44</sup> Crivelli references this devotional practice with the crown heightened in gilt *pastiglia* that appears to have been 'left' at the feet of the Virgin of the altarpiece for Porto San Giorgio (**fig. 90**). Offered by the tiny individual kneeling beside it, the crown is suspended between the moment of donation and its destiny to adorn the Virgin's as yet uncrowned head.

On a miraculous painting of the Virgin and Child, such as the *Madonna del Clero* in Ascoli's Cathedral (1480s), a replacement by Pietro Alemanno of an original attributed to Saint Luke that was destroyed in a fire,<sup>45</sup> ex-votos in the form of jewellery attached to the surface appear as separate entities from the painted image (**fig. 29**). They are nailed directly into the panel and do not interact with the painted representation. On sculptures, however, ex-voto crowns and jewels adorn the figure as they would a person. What has not yet been discussed in relation to Crivelli's relief and its connection with ex-votos is that they have more in common with the way in which votive jewellery appears to sit on a sculpture than it does on a painting. This is due to the way relief follows painted volume, as analysed above. The Vivarini partners' altarpieces combining sculpture and painting — the most splendid examples of which are in the Church of San Zaccaria, Venice — offered Crivelli an important model for the multi-panelled altarpiece in its richest form (**fig. 4**). It is quite possible that Crivelli had the example of his Venetian teachers in mind when he designed his mixed-media polyptychs, particularly since the original frame of the cathedral altarpiece closely resembles the Gothic carpentry of the Vivarini altarpieces (**fig. 14**).

Surviving examples of jewellery that were made to adorn sculptures connect in material and design with Crivelli's jewels. One such example is the necklace and crown made for a polychrome *Virgin and Child* dating to the mid-fourteenth century, originally housed in the church of Santi Pietro e Paolo in Elce, about 100km north-west of Ascoli (**fig. 146**).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> There are many invoices relating to commissions for such objects from goldsmiths. On 7<sup>th</sup> November 1503, Pietro Paolo di Nardo from the San Vito province of Ascoli Piceno, agreed to make a crown for a statue of the Virgin in the Church of San Francesco, Ascoli. Costantino G. Bulgari, *Argentieri gemmari e orafi d'Italia. Terza Parte: Marche-Romagna* (Rome: Ugo Bozzi Editore 1969), 41. On the practice of crowning icons, see Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 320; Holmes, *The Miraculous Image*, 8, 59, 166.

<sup>44</sup> Stephen J. Campbell, "The *Virgin and Child with St. Francis, St. Bernardino of Siena, and the Donor Fra Bernardino Ferretti*," in Campbell, *Ornament and Illusion*, Campbell, 208.

<sup>45</sup> The photo was taken before a recent restoration, when the ex-votos were removed. See Papetti and Di Provido, *Pietro Alemanno*, 142-3.

<sup>46</sup> Benedetta Montavecchi, "Il gallone prezioso scoperto sotto la gessatura della Madonna dei Elce," <http://www.oreficeriadriatica.it/index.php?page=97#nota8> (accessed 20 September 2019).

Unlike the silver votive crown that sits atop a twelfth-century wooden crucifix in the church of San Salvatore, Arquata del Tronto, Ascoli Piceno (**fig. 147**) — where, as with many miraculous objects, there is a stark disjuncture between the humble materials and naïve execution of the figure, and its elaborate metalwork embellishment — in the case of the *Madonna di Elce* its adornments were made for it from the beginning and correspond with the rest of the figure.<sup>47</sup> Like Crivelli’s jewellery in relief, the wooden, gilded crown and necklace belonging to the sculpture are not materially-precious ex-votos added by the faithful, but were made to adorn the figure from the outset. In particular, the necklace, which is actually more a border to the Virgin’s gown than a separate piece of jewellery (**fig. 148**), is striking in its similarity to the one worn by Crivelli’s *Virgin* from the larger altarpiece for San Domenico, Ascoli (**fig. 140**). Both are conceived as textiles (Crivelli’s lined with a *pastiglia* ‘cord’ and the sculpture’s made of actual cloth) studded with glass gems and gilt balls. It is possible that Crivelli was referencing such adornments made for sculptures. However, as Benedetta Montevocchi notes, the crown and the necklace of the *Madonna di Elce* are also close to the kind worn by noblewomen of the period.<sup>48</sup> Jeweled accessories for sacred images clearly have a different function to those worn by real women. However, when they are integrated with the figure, as in Crivelli’s images, rather than attached at a later date and made of starkly different materials like ex-votos, the effect is closer to how jewels sit upon the bodies of real people. Indeed, Stefano Papetti and others have noted that Crivelli based the clothing of his female saints on contemporary fashions.<sup>49</sup>

As figures with their own wardrobes, the sacred, bejewelled beings represented in Crivelli’s polyptychs thus take on anthropomorphic attributes.<sup>50</sup> Jewels, which clothe voluminous bodies, stake a claim for their presence as living beings, and yet their miraculous aesthetic, recalling ex-votos, already anticipates the figures’ sainthood. Crivelli thus asserts the miraculous potential of his images, anticipating their cultic status and implicitly dictating

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<sup>47</sup> On the typically humble materials of miraculous images, see Holmes, *The Miraculous Image*, 165-6.

<sup>48</sup> Montevocchi, “Il gallone prezioso.”

<sup>49</sup> Papetti, “Vestimenta picta dal Maestro di Offida al Crivelli,” in Nardi and Papetti, *Ascoli: la festa*, 38-74; Papetti, “Un secolo di tessuti,” 75-90; Michele Polverari, ed., *Gli abiti di Carlo Crivelli* (Ancona: Stampa Tecnoprint, 1990), exhibition catalogue, Pinacoteca Comunale Francesco Podesti, Ancona.

<sup>50</sup> Golsenne suggests that adorning an image with ornaments indicates how the faithful treated images as living people. *Carlo Crivelli*, 149; On Madonnas and images with wardrobes, and the anthropomorphisation of images, see Holmes, 166-7; 181-94; Monnas, *Merchants, Princes and Painters*, 168; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 48, 304-5; Richard Trexler, “Dressing and Undressing Images: An Analytic Sketch,” in *Religion in Social Context in Europe and America, 1200-1700* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2002), 374-408; Richard Trexler, “Being and Non-Being: Parameters of the Traditional Religious Image,” in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, eds. Erik Thunø and Gerhard Wolf (Rome: L’Erma di Bretschneider, 2004), 15-27.

how they should be used.<sup>51</sup> Witnessed within a niche, the sacred beings confront the viewer with their tangible presence, an effect that is further enhanced by the flatness of the gold ground. Their bodies, painted with obsessive detail, appear as distinct entities to the reflective gold, making them visually project forward from the surface of the different material that backs them.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, Crivelli's shrewd manipulation of shadow gives the impression that his figures are three-dimensional beings, whose physical presence casts shadows on the surfaces behind them.

### Entities that cast shadows

The Virgin's body in the high altarpiece for San Domenico, Ascoli (1476), casts a shadow onto the cloth-of-honour and marble throne behind her; her head casts a shadow onto her gold halo (**fig. 78**). Crivelli employed shadow in the same way in several other instances where the body is backed by a painted object, as in the *Metropolitan Madonna*, a small panel dating to the early 1480s, probably made for private devotion (**fig. 3**). In this painting, it is interesting to note that the shadows cast by the Virgin's body and the vegetable festoon onto the cloth-of-honour are rendered with the same force as that of the *trompe-l'oeil* fly, whose shadow suggests that it has just 'landed' on the surface of the panel itself. In doing so, Crivelli suggested that the Madonna too could be in front of the panel, though the parapet acts as a safety barrier, putting a stop to this illusion.

Of the *Crucifixion* now in the Brera, the cimasa of a polyptych made for the Cathedral of Camerino in c. 1488 (**fig. 13**), Alison Wright observed, "[. . .] Christ's body, as in sculpture, casts a shadow on the grainy wood of the cross [. . .]."<sup>53</sup> Moreover, in this panel, Christ's halo, supposedly composed of immaterial, divine light, casts a shadow.<sup>54</sup> It could be that Crivelli had in mind those representations of the Crucifixion in which Christ's body is sculpted in wood and attached to a painted panel depicting the scene at Golgotha. In an example by Niccolò di Liberatore dating to 1480 (**fig. 149**), Christ's sculpted and polychromed body casts real shadows onto the cross in a way that resembles Crivelli's fictive shadow,

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<sup>51</sup> Golsenne also makes this point: Golsenne *Carlo Crivelli*, 150.

<sup>52</sup> Flack described how Crivelli makes his fruit "float" in front of the gold ground, due to the "contrast between the flatness of the gold leaf and the super-realism of the painted fruit," an effect she calls "startling and magical." Flack, "On Carlo Crivelli," 94.

<sup>53</sup> Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 58.

<sup>54</sup> As noted in Vera-Simone Schulz, "Intricate Letters and the Reification of Light: Prolegomena on the Pseudo-Inscribed Haloes in Giotto's *Madonna di San Giorgio alla Costa* and Masaccio's *San Giovenale Triptych*," *Mitteilungen Des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 58, no. 1 (2016): 65.

which appears as if 'in' and 'on' the Brera *Crucifixion*. In a polyptych with ornament in relief, there are also real shadows cast by the relief itself, and it is therefore difficult to distinguish real shadows and painted shadows, a confusion that must have been especially evident when the altarpieces were lit by flicking candle from below in a church.<sup>55</sup> When an oblique light source is applied to the panel of *Saint Peter* from the Altarpiece for San Domenico, for example, it is clear how the conflation of real and painted shadow is possible (**fig. 150**). Indeed, it would seem that Crivelli wished to play on this conflation. The natural shadows of elements in relief are often reinforced by painted shadows, such as those backing the *pastiglia* studs on the horse's bridle of the Boston *Saint George and the Dragon*, part of the altarpiece for Porto San Giorgio dating to 1470 (**fig. 151**), as well as the painted shadows that accompany the relief on the armour of *Saint Michael* from the smaller altarpiece for San Domenico in Ascoli, particularly evident in the child's face (**fig. 36**).<sup>56</sup>

In the time of Crivelli, the study of shadows formed part of the science of optics, which drew heavily upon the eleventh-century treatise entitled *Epistle on the Properties of Shadows* composed by the Arab scholar Ibn al-Haytham (c.965-c.1040). Translated into Latin in 1200 and studied by scholars in Paris including Roger Bacon (c.1219/20-c.1292), and by renaissance scientists, most famously Leonardo da Vinci, the *Epistle* is thought to provide the basis for the latter's theory of the *penumbra* — the partial shadow composed of light and shade, as distinct from the full shadow.<sup>57</sup> Although we cannot know if Crivelli's shadows were informed by scientific principles, it is interesting to note that he understood how different situations cause different types of shadows. His art employs various shadows to reproduce reality effects that engage the viewer's senses. As well as the real shadows cast from relief (**fig. 150**), the reinforced glazed shadows backing the relief (**fig. 151**), and the painted shadows cast by objects apparently onto the surface of the painting — most strikingly, the festoon 'draped' across the surface of the *Vision of the Blessed Gabriele* (c.1489), which exposes the painting as fiction (**fig. 11**) — Crivelli also painted natural shadows internal to the pictorial scene. The shadow cast by Saint Emidius in *The Annunciation* (1486, **fig. 2**), for example, is spread over the adjacent surfaces of the floor and the exterior of Mary's house, forming an abstract but highly convincing shape that suggests Crivelli observed the behaviour of shadows carefully in reality. Moreover, this 'natural' shadow tapers out slightly,

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<sup>55</sup> Peta Motture has also pointed out that Crivelli's combination of painted and real shadows cast by elements in relief creates ambivalence. Motture, "Agostino di Duccio and Carlo Crivelli," 166.

<sup>56</sup> Pocobene, "Carlo Crivelli's *Saint George*," 139.

<sup>57</sup> Dominique Raynaud, "A Hitherto Unknown Treatise on Shadows Referred to by Leonardo da Vinci," in Dupré, *Perspective as Practice*, 259-277.

and is much softer than the darker shadows cast by the *trompe-l'oeil* cucumber and apple, hinting that Crivelli understood the principles of Leonardo's *penumbra* (fig. 152).

It was not until the seventeenth century that painters would combine real shadows cast from sculpture or architecture with fictive painted shadows, in fresco cycles such as Giovanni Battista Gaulli's (1639-1709) *Triumph of the Name of Jesus* (1661-79) in the Church of Il Gesù, Rome, in which the gilded coffers of the ceiling are glazed brown to imply that painted clouds are hovering just above, casting shadows (fig. 153). In the fifteenth century, Rogier van der Weyden (c.1399-1464) utilised shadow to give the illusion that painted figures were three-dimensional in works such as his monumental *Deposition* of 1438 (fig. 154). Within a cramped, frieze-like space, the figures at the back of the composition cast shadows onto the gold background surface of the niche, similar to the way in which Crivelli's figures cast shadows onto various materials. It is quite possible that Crivelli may have seen a similar use of shadow in Netherlandish paintings that are known to have been imported to Italy.<sup>58</sup> In one of his earliest paintings, the *Virgin and Child* in the San Diego Museum of Art dating to c.1460-8 (fig. 155), Crivelli used a dark glaze to paint shadows onto gold leaf, making it appear as if the fruit and cloth-of-honour are distinct entities from the picture's ground. His interest in the potential of shadows to comment on the relationship between appearance and reality therefore stems to the beginning of his career.

As Gombrich observed, shadows are both concrete and elusive: "[. . .] they are part of our environment but they appear and disappear from sight, they are fugitive and changeable [. . .]"<sup>59</sup> Although, as he noted, shadows are evidence of palpable reality, they have also been regarded with some suspicion for their capacity to trick the senses, since as far back as Plato's *Republic*, in which humans, transfixed by the shadows on the walls of a cave, become convinced that they are witnessing reality.<sup>60</sup> Crivelli clearly recognised the potential of shadows to comment upon the distinction between the real and the fictive in his representations. He used them as a tool to both promote and deny a sense of the holy personages' physical presence. With their projecting jewels, Crivelli's holy figures ask to be perceived as physical entities, like sculptures or even real people. They teeter on the edge of

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<sup>58</sup> Lorne Campbell, "Notes on Netherlandish Paintings in the Veneto in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries," *The Burlington Magazine* 123, no. 941 (1981): 467-73; Bernardo Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown, "Painting in Fifteenth-Century Venice and the *ars nova* of the Netherlands," in Aikema and Brown, *Renaissance Venice and the North*, 176-83; Paula Nuttall, *From Flanders to Florence: The Impact of Netherlandish Painting 1400-1500* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 265, n. 19.

<sup>59</sup> Ernst H. Gombrich, *Shadows: The Depiction of Cast Shadows in Western Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), 11.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

being confused for the latter, but illusion is swiftly reigned in through the negation of the image. This is achieved in many ways,<sup>61</sup> but fundamental to this discussion is that the figures themselves — their bodies — are never heightened in relief.<sup>62</sup> Although their presence is implied by the real elements that adorn their bodies, which exist physically in the space of the viewer, their painted, flat, flesh is a reminder that the sacred referent transcends the material reality of the picture. As Antonino Pierozzi, the influential Observant Dominican who mentored one of Crivelli's patrons, Fra Costanzo da Fabriano, counselled, the allure of the subject is sinful, but the allure of beauty is acceptable.<sup>63</sup> Crivelli's idiom, in which the holy beings are conceived as metaphoric idols, seems to have absorbed this moral and aesthetic standard.

### **Madonnas with *pastiglia* revetments**

The role of relief in Crivelli's work is multifarious, but in each case, it offers a commentary on the relationship between earthly and divine, tangible and intangible. While on the one hand, jewellery in relief draws on the aesthetic of miraculous images that have been adorned with ex-votos, its application as if to an actual body also provides a convincing physical presence to nonetheless immaterial beings. What else in Crivelli's works receives relief? As well as their jewels, saints' attributes are often the recipients of relief. In the altarpiece for Massa Fermana (1468), the grill upon which Saint Lawrence was martyred reappears as a precious object in reflective material (**fig. 7**). Of course, it was fragments of objects such as these that became the focus of devotion on the part of the faithful in the form of relics, encased in splendid reliquaries. In the painting, Saint Laurence's grill, like Christ's finely wrought crown of thorns in gold *pastiglia* in the Porto San Giorgio altarpiece made two years later (**fig. 77**), becomes both relic and reliquary simultaneously. Relief has the capacity to imply the efficacious nature of that which it covers.

This is the case with the two paintings made for private devotion of the *Madonna and Child* in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Accademia Carrara, both of which date to the early 1480s, and, unusually, show the Virgin's entire mantle covered in ornate *pastiglia* motifs (**figs. 1, 156**). Although Crivelli had covered the Virgin's mantle in *pastiglia*

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<sup>61</sup> See Introduction, 6-7, 14-16; Ch. Five.

<sup>62</sup> This tends to also be the case in other paintings where *pastiglia* was used, although the panels attributed to the *Master of the Putti* in the Palazzo Cini, Venice, and the Accademia Carrara, Bergamo (c.1450/60), unusually show saints' fingers executed with *pastiglia*.

<sup>63</sup> Gilbert Creighton, "The Archbishop on the Painters of Florence, 1450," *The Art Bulletin* 41, no. 1 (1959): 76, 79.

ornament on one other occasion — the smaller altarpiece for San Domenico in Ascoli dating to the same time (**fig. 75**) — its effect on a small-scale work for private devotion is quite different. *Pastiglia* would have encouraged a tactile engagement with the object in the devotee’s possession, and close access would have made it easy to run one’s fingers over the relief. Crivelli never used *pastiglia* for other private devotional works, and the way in which it manifests in the London and Bergamo panels is particular, since, unlike in the central panel of the smaller altarpiece for San Domenico now in Budapest, here the relief covers the Virgin’s head, too. As a protective garment that encases the Virgin’s body and appears to have been added to the painted image, I would suggest that this manifestation of relief has a particular function. Rather than “the mantles of gilded stucco” of these Madonnas being “a relatively archaic feature in paintings whose primary aesthetic is that of the Veneto-Paduan Renaissance of the late 1450s,” as Lightbown reductively concludes,<sup>64</sup> I argue that they evince Crivelli’s interest in Byzantine icons with revetments, which are finely-wrought silver or gold sheaths ornamented in relief that partially cover the painted image.<sup>65</sup> Although Crivelli’s use of *pastiglia* certainly developed from his knowledge of Venetian art, he employed it in strategic ways to draw upon the authority of a range of sacred objects — goldsmiths’ art, textiles, as well as icons. Moreover, in no extant painting from the Veneto-Paduan region that Crivelli may have seen was *pastiglia* used as a sheath for the Virgin.

The relief on Byzantine revetments largely depicts abstract ornament, and narrative scenes or figures are often depicted at the border. When the revetment is found on an image of the Virgin and/or Christ, it normally covers the entire background and not the painted figure itself, although there are several examples that cover every surface of the icon but the face (**fig. 157**).<sup>66</sup> The revetted icon of the *Virgin Annunciate* donated to the town of Fermo by Giacomo della Marca in 1473 may have motivated Crivelli’s use of *pastiglia* on the London and Budapest paintings (**fig. 158**).<sup>67</sup> This was perhaps the most famous sacred image in the Marche for its saintly authorship, prestigious provenance and cultic history. Housed initially

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<sup>64</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 266.

<sup>65</sup> The most up-to-date and comprehensive study of revetments is Elizabeth Yoder Moss, “Framing the Holy: Revetments on Late Byzantine Icons,” two vols. (PhD thesis., University of Toronto, 2016). On the wide-ranging terminology used for these metal sheaths, see *Ibid.*, 1:4-14. On Revetted icons generally, see also André Grabar, *Les revêtements en or et en argent des icônes byzantines du Moyen Âge* (Venice: Institut hellénique d’études byzantines et post-byzantines, 1975).

<sup>66</sup> For example, the Greek icon from Morea now in the Church of San Samuele, Venice. See Moss, “Framing the Holy,” 2: cat. 33 a, b.

<sup>67</sup> On this icon, see *Ibid.*, 197-250; Giuseppe Capriotti, “Defining the Boundaries of a Lawful Cult: History of an Adriatic Icon,” *Ikon. Journal of Iconographic Studies* 9 (2016): 243-252; Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 144-151. Golsenne analyses the icon in relation to the function of sacred images in the Marche generally, but does not consider how Crivelli may have explicitly imitated its aesthetic in the London and Bergamo paintings.

in the Franciscan Church of the Annunziata and then in the cathedral, it is almost certain that Crivelli knew this prestigious image. When it arrived in Fermo, Crivelli was working in the neighbouring town of Ascoli on his polyptych for the cathedral. He had contacts in Fermo following his commissions there for the Dominicans in 1470 and in the nearby villages of Massa Fermana in 1468 and Porto San Giorgio in 1470. The icon had a very specific purpose: it was used by Giacomo della Marca to deter a local cult that had developed around what he believed to be an inauthentic image, which a certain Pietro Albanese had created as a way of generating an income from donations.<sup>68</sup> The icon he offered was, instead, purportedly by the hand of Saint Luke, and its distinctly Byzantine metal revetment with Greek inscriptions would have been seen as a sign of its holy origins and powers.<sup>69</sup> As an authentic sacred image, the Fermo icon would have been an important model for Crivelli, whose later recruitment of the Albanian artist, Michele Greco da Valona, as his *garzone* indicates an interest in the 'Greek' manner of painting.<sup>70</sup>

Like Crivelli's use of *pastiglia*, metal revetments usually leave the flesh of the Virgin or Child exposed. In the case of the Fermo icon, only the background is covered, unlike the London and Bergamo paintings in which just the drapery is adorned. Despite this difference, the impression in all three works is of a precious, finely wrought sheath framing the Virgin that appears as a separate entity to the painted image. The play on the distinction between the divine referent, who is represented as a painted *imago*, and the materially present, honorific covering is a feature of both icon and paintings. The Virgin's pose in the icon, with her head tilted in contemplation of her son's future sacrifice, as she looks out at a beyond, is similar to that of Crivelli's paintings, and the slightly bulbous shape of the head of the V&A Madonna and her expressive hand gestures with elongated fingers recall those of the icon (**fig. 1**). Even the Virgin's physiognomy, with her small mouth, long, straight nose that leads in curved lines to defined brows and deep-set eyes, as well as the anatomically incorrect collar bone, which is too high up the neck, appears to derive from the Fermo icon and Byzantine models more generally. In particular, in both the London and the Bergamo paintings the Virgin's mantle covers her veiled head, which is less common in Crivelli's depictions of the Madonna, and emphatically encases the Madonna.

That Crivelli had a Byzantine aesthetic in mind when he created both paintings is highly likely, as is the case, of course, with many other fifteenth-century Italian artists making

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<sup>68</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 345-6.

<sup>69</sup> On the 'Byzantinizing' effect of the image and the function of its Greek inscriptions, see Moss, "Framing the Holy," 197-250.

<sup>70</sup> See Ch. Three, 122, n. 120.

paintings for private devotion depicting the half-length Virgin.<sup>71</sup> Thomas Golsenne has explored Crivelli's response to Byzantine icons, arguing that the very repetitiveness of his compositions draws upon the power of the copy in Byzantine image theory.<sup>72</sup> He also proposes that Crivelli's gold grounds function like those of icons: as an abstract field that sets up a dialectic between human figure and divine light.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, I would suggest that the precise function of the revetment may have informed Crivelli's decisions to sheath the mantles of the London and Bergamo Madonnas with gilt *pastiglia*. The purpose of a revetment was to exalt the sacred icon.<sup>74</sup> It may also have worked to promote the icon's powers: in Christianity, the practice of veiling and covering sacred images and objects has a long and varied history, but in every case the partial or temporary concealing of an image could preserve its efficacy by suspending the moment of its revelation.<sup>75</sup> Like the jewelled ex-voto, the revetment was material proof of the image's divine power, as it was often added in thanks for the miracles performed by the holy personage through the image.<sup>76</sup> A nun's vision in the mid-eighteenth century at the Santuario della Madonna delle Grazie, near Fabriano, demonstrates the will of the Madonna to be embellished in a precious sheath. A manuscript records that the nun saw the Virgin, who said, "*Io vollo essere vestita d'oro e no di straci [ . . . ]*" — "I want to be dressed in gold and not in rags [ . . . ]."<sup>77</sup> Although much later, the vision testifies to a belief in the volition of sacred images, which is documented on countless occasions throughout the fifteenth century.<sup>78</sup>

The ex-voto and similarly the revetment also denote a mutual benefit: they honoured the sacred personage, but in exchange they offered protection upon the community or individual that had adorned the image.<sup>79</sup> This was certainly the role that Giacomo della Marca bestowed upon the sacred images he donated to the communities in

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<sup>71</sup> Goffen, "Icon and Vision," 487-518; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 23; Nagel and Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, 109-122; Holmes, *The Miraculous Image*, 162-8.

<sup>72</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 81-2.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 84-9.

<sup>74</sup> Michele Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista: Storia delle immagini sacre attribuite a San Luca* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 1998), 237.

<sup>75</sup> Hills, *Veiled Presence*, 60-75; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 481; Holmes, *The Miraculous Image*, 218-227.

<sup>76</sup> Bissera Pentcheva has described revetments as "*anathemata*": human gifts to the sacred prototype represented, which remain subsidiary to the painted figure. Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual and the Sense in Byzantium* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 208.

<sup>77</sup> Giuseppe Cucco, ed., *Santuari nelle Marche* (Urbino: Università degli studi di Urbino, 1996), 105.

<sup>78</sup> For example, see Richard Trexler, "Florentine Religious Experience: The Sacred Image," *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972): 7-41; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 194-5; Bacci, *Il pennello dell'Evangelista*, 61-2; Holmes, *The Miraculous Image*, 47; 112; 93.

<sup>79</sup> Some revetments incorporated inscriptions in the metalwork, beseeching the holy figure for help and protection. Moss, "Framing the Holy," 157-196.

his care. The convent of the Clarissas in Ferrara received from him an image of the Virgin with handwritten instructions, in which the Franciscan encouraged devotees to turn to it in times of “need or danger.”<sup>80</sup> Following this, they would receive assistance, a pledge that Giacomo della Marca further authorised by marking the instructions with a wax seal of the Name of Jesus, the controversial tablet first employed by his teacher, Bernardino da Siena, to sanctify his actions.<sup>81</sup>

Nothing is known of the patronage of either the London or the Bergamo painting, but both were probably commissioned either by wealthy members of the laity for their private chambers, the clergy for the sacristies of their churches, or the mendicants for the cells of their convents.<sup>82</sup> The bird motif, which I argued in Chapter One had a particular currency in Ascoli for its association with Saint Emidius, ornaments the mantle of the London Madonna. Stylistically, the painting is comparable to the smaller altarpiece for San Domenico, Ascoli, whose Madonna also has a mantle entirely raised with gilt *pastiglia*. Scholars date both works to c.1480. In Chapter One, I suggested that the small devotional panel in the V&A was perhaps commissioned by the town’s Bishop, Prospero Caffarelli, who may have been involved in commissioning Crivelli’s polyptych for the cathedral.<sup>83</sup> The *pastiglia* revetment could therefore be seen as a suitably honorific adornment for the Madonna in exchange for her protection of a devout individual, whose spiritual counsel ensured the moral well-being of an entire community.<sup>84</sup> In the iconography of the Madonna of Mercy, the interior of the Virgin’s mantle acts as a safe space for the individuals under her protection. Golsenne has suggested that Crivelli alludes to this iconography in the V&A painting, in which the Virgin wraps the partially naked Christ Child within the interior of her mantle to protect him from the stone parapet (**fig. 1**).<sup>85</sup> This convincing proposal supports my argument that the *pastiglia* mantle had efficacious properties that enhanced the Virgin’s attentiveness to prayer. Golsenne goes on to suggest that the outer *pastiglia* embroidery is like a precious reliquary, one that exalts the figure it wraps, which acts as the relic.<sup>86</sup> To this, I would add that many relics were wrapped in precious cloths, a custom that Crivelli and his

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<sup>80</sup> Roberto Paciocco, “Santi e culti nella storia della Marca d’Ancona (secoli XIII-XV),” in *I Francescani nelle Marche*, eds. Luigi Pellegrini and Roberto Paciocco (Milan: Cinisello Balsamo, 2000), 98.

<sup>81</sup> On the Name of Jesus, see Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 244-7.

<sup>82</sup> For example, the small Madonna in Ancona was painted for a Franciscan sacristy. See Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 374.

<sup>83</sup> Ch. One, 55-7. On Caffarelli’s patronage of the Cathedral Altarpiece, see Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 144.

<sup>84</sup> On the Virgin’s mantle as protective, particularly in images of the Madonna of Mercy, see Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 357-8.

<sup>85</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 117.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

patrons, especially Caffarelli, would have been aware of given the Byzantine cloths that protected the relics of Saint Emidius housed in Ascoli's cathedral.<sup>87</sup>

Whether the owners of Crivelli's Madonnas acknowledged the visual relationship between the Virgin's *pastiglia* sheath and the revetments on Byzantine icons, such as in the Fermo example, cannot be known. However, it is clear that artists often employed what Megan Holmes calls "characteristic formal qualities" that transformed the represented holy figures into willing and attentive recipients of prayer and votive address.<sup>88</sup> In the case of Crivelli's two Madonnas, the *pastiglia* revetment asks the viewer to acknowledge the Virgin's divinity and acts as a reminder of her role as the Mother of God, whom she envelops in her protective mantle of tactile, raised gold. Its luxurious materiality appears as ontologically separate from the painted, immaterial beings, as if it had been affixed to the panel by human hand. Like the miraculous images that were remade by living artists during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with no impairment to their cultic status,<sup>89</sup> I would argue that Crivelli's reveted Madonnas consciously employ a spiritually-effective idiom that derives from sacred images such as the Fermo icon. The fact that Crivelli created images specifically to encourage cults around the figures represented, namely Giacomo della Marca and Gabriele Ferretti (**fig. 11**), both of whom had recently died when Crivelli painted their likenesses, suggests that he was in tune with the properties and requirements of auratic paintings.<sup>90</sup> In the creation of cult images, *pastiglia*, and relief more generally, was one of Crivelli's most potent tools.

## The materiality of halos

So far, this chapter has demonstrated that Crivelli's use of relief functions differently in a polyptych for a church altar than it does in a half-length Madonna for private devotion. While in a polyptych, relief applied to limited details and accessories recedes as painted volume recedes, the *pastiglia* sheathing the Madonnas covers a much larger expanse of the panel and does not recede with the figure; like a reveted icon, it appears as a separate entity

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<sup>87</sup> See Ch. One, 53-60.

<sup>88</sup> Holmes, *The Miraculous Image*, 3.

<sup>89</sup> Bernardo Daddi (c.1280-1348) was asked to remake the miracle-working image that was destroyed in a fire at the Church of Orsanmichele, Florence. See *Ibid.*, 146; Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 398. Pietro Alemanno's painting known as the *Madonna delle Grazie*, or "*Del Giro*" for the circuit it made of Ascoli's parish churches, was made to substitute a destroyed original attributed to Saint Luke (**fig. 29**). See Papetti and Di Provido, *Pietro Alemanno*, 142.

<sup>90</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 145.

to the devotional image. However, in all cases, relief indicates the sacred capacity of that which it adorns, taking on the role of an ex-voto, a reliquary or a Byzantine revetment. The physical substance of relief acts as as a finely-crafted, manmade addition that adorns an image of the immaterial divine. However, the elements that are most consistently depicted in relief in Crivelli's oeuvre are halos, which supposedly do not exist in the terrestrial realm. In fact, halos often have the most exaggerated materiality of any object in Crivelli's compositions. Unlike jewellery, textiles and attributes such as Saint Peter's keys and Lawrence's grill, which are of earthly matter, the nimbus is commonly understood as a sphere of divine light that artists have used since antiquity to indicate the sanctity of the figure depicted.<sup>91</sup> It seems, therefore, paradoxical that Crivelli's depicts halos as physical objects that cast shadows onto the surfaces they overlap, physical entities that are no less material than the marble thrones that support the Virgin and Child, or, indeed, the wooden panels that support his depictions. In the final part of this study of relief in Crivelli's work, I ask: why halos are represented as material objects, if they are supposed to represent divine light?

That Crivelli intended his *pastiglia* halos to be understood as material objects is confirmed by his 'flat' depictions of them, which describe the nimbus as a meticulously crafted, solid disk that recedes in space and reflects light. The halos of the *Virgin and Child* in the Metropolitan panel are heavy disks of solid gold with cabochon gems and pearls attached to their surfaces (**fig. 3**). These precious stones form shadows onto the reflective disks. The red cruciform of Christ's halo is raised from the gold disk; its edges catch the light in such a way that it appears like a varnished, wooden surface (**fig. 159**). There are many instances in which Italian artists conceived of halos as material objects in the fifteenth century: Francesco del Cossa (c.1435/6-1477/8) gave his Gabriel in the Dresden *Annunciation* (1470-2) a halo that was attached to the angel's head with a metal contraption, which, it has been suggested, resembles those used in theatrical performances such as *sacra rappresentazioni* (**fig. 160**).<sup>92</sup> In Piero della Francesca's polyptych of Saint Anthony (c.1470), the solid gold halos of the Madonna and Child are so intensely polished that they actually reflect an image of their heads (**fig. 161**).<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Adolphe Napoléon Didron, *Christian Iconography: The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages*, trans. E. J. Millington, vol. 1 (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1851), 22-106. An example of a halo representing light in early Christian art is seen in the figure of Christ in the late third-century mosaic in Mausoleum M in the Vatican Necropolis beneath St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

<sup>92</sup> Schulz, "Intricate Letters," 65.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

Adophe Napoléon Didron, author of the authoritative volumes on Christian iconography, had no explanation for this perplexing issue:

“Previous to [the fifteenth century], and even throughout the fourteenth century, [the nimbus] had had been regarded as an aureole, a light emanating from the head [. . .] In the fifteenth century, on the contrary, the form of the nimbus only was preserved; its signification was entirely lost, and it seemed rather to be regarded as a head-dress. The aureole became gradually more and more condensed; the light solidified and extinguished; and the nimbus itself transformed into a large cockade [. . .]”<sup>94</sup>

The meaning of the later, “solidified,” nimbus Didron described has been interpreted in several different ways.<sup>95</sup> Since Lightbown’s book on Crivelli is in many ways a compendium of Christian iconography, it is fitting that he addresses the issue. He suggests that William Durandus’s description in his liturgical treatise, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum* (1286), of the halo as “a heavenly crown in the shape of a round shield,” which derives from Psalm 5:13, “O Lord, thou has crowned us with the shield of thy goodwill,” may have informed fourteenth and fifteenth-century interpretations.<sup>96</sup> In her study on pseudo-inscribed halos in early Italian painting, Vera-Simone Schultz quotes the same passage, adding that Durandus’s description imagines the halo he describes as “painted,” which may have provoked painters to take actual shields imported to Italy from Damascus and Islamic domains as points of reference. This may, she suggests, explain why so many halos in early Italian painting are pseudo-inscribed.<sup>97</sup> The only other scholar who has addressed the materiality of the halo in early Italian painting is Christopher Lakey, who explores the phenomenon in relation to Giotto’s frescos in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua of c.1305 (**fig. 162**).<sup>98</sup> Lakey, who justly sees Giotto’s halos built up in relief as belonging to the same concept as *pastiglia* in easel painting, uses his examples to argue that divine light was understood as a physical entity in Christian theology at this time, describing halos as “models for material phenomena as

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<sup>94</sup> Didron, *Christian Iconography*, 101.

<sup>95</sup> Halos have been studied in detail from a technical perspective. See Skaug, *Punchmarks*; Mojmir Frinta, “Stamped halos in the “Maestà” by Simone Martini,” in *Simone Martini: atti del convegno; Siena, 27 - 29 marzo 1985; atti del convegno; Siena, 27 - 29 marzo 1985*, ed. Luciano Bellosi (Florence: Centro Di, 1988); Norman Muller, “In a New Light: the Origins of Reflective Halo Tooling in Siena,” *Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte* 75 (2012): 153-178. Halos have also been analysed as a way of describing a theological shift from a medieval to a renaissance way of painting, and one that sees them as three-dimensional objects, although this account does not consider that the change may represent a shift in the concept of the halo, from light to shield. See Marvin Eisenberg, “A few words about halos, visible and invisible,” *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 21, no. 3 (2002): 1-6.

<sup>96</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 167.

<sup>97</sup> Schulz, “Intricate Letters,” 78.

<sup>98</sup> Lakey, “The Materiality of Light in Medieval Italian Painting,” in “Medieval Materiality,” ed. Anne E. Lester and Katherine C. Little, special issue, *English Language Notes* 53, no. 2, (2015): 119-136.

active components of sacred space.”<sup>99</sup> He puts forward a convincing case for understanding visuality and materiality as co-existent in the late medieval and early modern period, rather than mutually exclusive, as has tended to be the case since ‘the material turn’ in art history and the humanities at large.<sup>100</sup>

One wonders, however, how Lakey might have interpreted Giotto’s *Last Judgement* cycle in the Arena frescoes in light of Durandus’s description. In the frescos, angels are armed with pseudo-inscribed shields situated among a dense throng of halos, which are precisely the same size and shape as the shields, although the latter are not, perhaps tellingly, built up in relief (**fig. 162**). In the monochromatic, unornamented underdrawing, the difference between shield and halo would not have been discernible, and it is possible that Giotto himself intended a visual and thematic parallel. Nonetheless, as Lakey points out, in the medieval period vision was understood in corporeal, often tactile terms, and this was still the case in the fifteenth century.<sup>101</sup> Vision and touch were understood to operate collectively, and today historians of Modern and Contemporary art, as well as scientists, agree that the human perception of objects is multisensory.<sup>102</sup> The tactility of vision in the Christian imagination is epitomised by the stigmatisation of Saint Francis, brought about by his vision of the crucified Christ supported by a winged seraph.<sup>103</sup> Artists represent this supernatural occurrence by showing rays of light emanating from the wounds of Christ that touch and penetrate the same body parts of Saint Francis. Crivelli’s depiction of the subject in the Massa Fermana Altarpiece suggests that he was aware of the multisensory significance of Saint Francis’s stigmata, since the rays that emanate from Christ’s wounds are heightened in gold *pastiglia*, rendering the visual experience a truly tactile one (**fig. 49**).

How best, then, to interpret Crivelli’s solid halos? Are they “heavenly crowns in the shape of round shields,” or do they reflect an understanding of light and vision as corporeal phenomena? Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore in detail Crivelli’s treatment of halos, the following observations can be made. Crivelli’s halos are rendered

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 132. The tactility of vision has received attention in recent studies. See Jacqueline E. Jung, “The Tactile and the Visionary: Notes of the Place of Sculpture in the Medieval Religious Imagination,” in *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art and History*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Index of Christian Art, 2010), 203-240; Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment*; Randolph, *Touching Objects*, 201, 214; Francois Quiviger, “Relief is in the mind: observations on Renaissance Relief Sculpture,” in Cooper and Leino, *Depth of Field*, 169-189. For tactile visuality in Byzantine image theory, see Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon*, 6-7; 101.

<sup>102</sup> For example, Francesca Bacci and David Melcher, ed., *Art and the Senses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>103</sup> For the importance of touch in Franciscan theology, see Gordon Rudy, *Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 104-5.

with *pastiglia* (fig. 112), punchwork (fig. 163), flat gold leaf (fig. 164), occasionally with gems or other embellishments (fig. 3). Several different types of halo are sometimes seen within the same altarpiece, although not within the same register. For example, in the altarpiece made for the Dominicans of Camerino (fig. 20), Crivelli used *pastiglia* halos for the saints on the main register, punchwork halos in the predella and flat disks of gold leaf, their volume articulated with painted shadows, in the pinnacles (fig. 123). In *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter* (1488), Crivelli gave the holy figures in the *pala* flat disks of gold leaf defined by painted shadows (fig. 21) and in the lunette now in Rome he gave them halos of *pastiglia* (fig. 165).

The varying of technique in a single work confirms that changes in Crivelli's halos do not form a teleological development, prompting us to wonder what the motivation behind the choice of a particular technique was. It may relate to the original viewing position. The lunette depicting the *Pietà* in Rome would have been seen from below (fig. 165), and rendering the halos in *pastiglia* would have made them stand out, literally. This could have been motivated by seeing examples of Trecento crucifixes that have halos projecting forward from the rest of the image, which were often positioned high on top of *tramezzi* in churches;<sup>104</sup> or indeed by viewing frescos with halos rendered in relief such as Giotto's for the Scrovegni Chapel (fig. 162). In both instances, the intention arguably was to draw attention to the figures' sanctity, which may not have been visible from below. If Crivelli's decisions, though, were formulaic and conditioned by viewing requirements, then why do not all other altarpieces show the halos of figures in the upper registers in relief? Several scholars have noticed recently that Crivelli's ornament changes depending on the register of the panel.<sup>105</sup> So while iconic saints in the main panel, who are present before the beholder to receive their prayers, are portrayed in the 'present tense', saints in narrative predellas or pinnacles are engaged in action in the 'past tense,' as Alison Wright puts it.<sup>106</sup> In this case, we might expect Crivelli's saints in the main registers to be distinctly more embodied in character than those in predellas, lunettes and pinnacles, which is often the case. But why, then, do not all altarpieces show the saints in the main registers with the nimbus in relief?

Another conundrum is what the halo is actually purported to represent. Is it a crown, a shield, a disk or divine light? Crivelli's various techniques hint at different possibilities.

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<sup>104</sup> Muller, "In a New Light," 157.

<sup>105</sup> Golsenne and Wright have analysed the change in ornament between *pala quadra* and polyptych: Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 189-193; Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 61-73. See also Ch. One, 57, Ch. Two, 72.

<sup>106</sup> Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 61.

When rendered with punchwork, for example, the nimbus appears more like a crown (**fig. 163**), whereas in *pastiglia* it resembles a shield (**fig. 112, 165**). In unornamented flat gold leaf, with its volume defined in painted shadows, it resembles a disk (**fig. 164**), but when rays of gold leaf are shown emanating from the head of a figure, it resembles light (**fig. 11**). About the latter, we can be certain that when Crivelli used gold leaf with rays, it was to show that the figure was blessed, or beatified, but not canonized, as is the case with the panels depicting San Giacomo della Marca (who was canonized only in 1726) and Gabriele Ferretti.<sup>107</sup> That rays of gold leaf represent light is clear from the many other instances in which they reappear in Crivelli's work, most significantly, the *Annunciation with Saint Emidius* (**fig. 2**). There is, therefore, a hierarchy at play in the distinction between the nimbus as rays of light or solid gold, though it is still not clear whether the solid gold is intended as a more corporeal manifestation of light, or if it is a different thing altogether. If it is light, then how can gems be stuck onto its surface, casting shadows (**fig. 3**)? What certainly complicates matters is when the Virgin is shown wearing a crown with a nimbus behind her head *and* rays of light emanating from her, as is the case in the London *Vision of the Blessed Gabriele* and the Brera *Coronation of the Virgin* (**figs. 164, 119**). Rays of light rendered with incisions are seen on the halo belonging to the crowned Virgin of the Montefiore dell'Aso altarpiece, while rays of light in *pastiglia* emanate from Christ's head, crowned with thorns and backed by a *pastiglia* halo, in the *Pietà* in both the Ascoli San Domenico and Cathedral altarpieces (**fig. 72**).

As the preceding analysis demonstrates, the question of halos and what they represent is complex, and would require further research to arrive at a better understanding. One issue that remains ambiguous is whether halos were believed to exist or if they were understood to belong to the realm of art as an iconographic attribute that was recognised as signifying sanctity. Accounts of visions in which the Virgin, Christ and saints are described as having a nimbus would perhaps clarify this, although such visions may also suggest that the imagery seen in art was informing the ways in which people imagined the divine, which many art historians now believe to be the case.<sup>108</sup> A broad study of halos, in which the concepts of divinity in the popular imagination, histories of light, vision, theology, as well as technical and theoretical methodologies were combined, would certainly shed light on this central issue in the history of religious painting.

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<sup>107</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 230; 369. As Lightbown notes, the thin gold disk surrounding the rays of light surrounding the head of *San Giacomo della Marca* were added following his canonisation.

<sup>108</sup> For example, Giuseppe Capriotti, "Visions, Mental Images, Real Pictures: The Mystical Experience and the Artistic Patronage of Sister Battista Da Varano," *Ikon* 6 (2013): 213-224.

However, presently it is possible to make several conclusions about Crivelli's halos. Crivelli conceived of a halo as a material object. This is proven by the consistent way in which he depicted light in other scenarios as an array of straight beams in gold leaf. Although it would be possible for the solid halo to signify beams of light that have joined together to form a more physical manifestation of light, the way in which gems are often embedded in the nimbus, and the fact that the nimbus can cast a shadow, limits this idea. What is, however, possible, is that the gold-leafed halo was understood to multiply light rather than *be* light, since gold was understood in the fifteenth century and prior as a diffuser of *lumen*, or radiated light, which was generated from *lux*, corporeal light omitted from worldly sources, in order to produce *splendour*.<sup>109</sup> According to the *Tractatus de Luce* by the thirteenth-century Franciscan, Bartolomeo da Bologna, *splendour* was the multiplication of light caused by reflections on a "polished or shining body."<sup>110</sup> The finely crafted, gold nimbus could, therefore, be seen as a disseminator of light, a powerful analogy for the wearer's role as a disseminator of God's message on earth. Since Crivelli was responsible for conjuring images of these saintly figures, it was he who enabled this message to spread. The proximity of the divine and earthly is also embodied in the very materiality of gold leaf, whose intrinsic properties were incorruptible, pure and stable like God, but which was made of minted gold coins, the currency of worldly value, and whose appearance was dependent upon the conditions of corporeal, earthly light.<sup>111</sup>

What is, furthermore, significant is that Crivelli sought to differentiate the gold of the halo from the gold ground in various ways. For example, when *pastiglia* was used for the halos in the Ascoli San Domenico and Cathedral altarpieces, it appears different from the burnished gold ground, either darker or lighter depending upon the direction of lighting, but never the same (**fig. 84**). This is because the burnished gold ground is more reflective, whereas gold leaf applied with a mordant appears comparatively matte. While this was certainly a practical way of making the nimbus stand out, and perhaps can be seen in the same vein as the techniques employed by Byzantine artists, who understood that working

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<sup>109</sup> Lakey, "The Materiality of Light," 121; Paul Hills, *The Light of Early Italian Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 11.

<sup>110</sup> Hills, *The Light of Early Italian Painting*, 11.

<sup>111</sup> For a summary of gold, and its symbolic and material value, as well as its functions as a ground for panel paintings, see Barbara Baert, "Between Technique and Symbolism: Notes on the Meaning of the Use of Gold in Pre-Eyckian Panel Painting," in *Pre-Eyckian Panel Painting in the Low Countries*, ed. Cyriel Stroob, vol. 2 (Brussels: Brepols, 2009), 7-22; On the circulation and market of gold in the Early Modern period, and the process of producing gold leaf and its use for Italian panel paintings, see Irma Passeri, "Gold Coins and Gold Leaf in Early Italian Painting," in Anderson, Dunlop and Smith, *The Matter of Art*, 97-115.

gold would scatter light,<sup>112</sup> it also suggests that halo and ground had quite different meanings. Although it is difficult to argue that Crivelli's gold grounds signify boundless, eternal space, since many of them are tooled with elaborate designs, which recall textiles and metalwork, they can nonetheless be interpreted as a field, or atmosphere — albeit an artificial, manmade one — inhabited by the sacred personages. Roland Betancourt described the gold ground of Byzantine icons recently as representing air and a conduit for vision itself, which illuminates the figures represented, enabling the viewer to perceive them.<sup>113</sup> This is a helpful way of understanding Crivelli's gold grounds, which captivate both halo and figure, making them project forward in space for the viewer's sensory delight. The gold ground operates like rays of *lumen*, impressing itself upon the gold relief nimbus and reflecting off it to emanate the spiritual guidance and protection of the individuals depicted in paint. The halo, a unique object, crowns the head of the holy person; it multiplies light and, like a shield, offers protection upon the recipient of its vision.<sup>114</sup>

## Conclusion

Crivelli's use of relief demonstrates a keen awareness of visual perception, and the ways in which it can be manipulated. *Pastiglia*, gems, carved wood and rope are made to interact spatially with the painted volume of the holy figures by an optical system of Crivelli's invention. As recent scholarship has shown, linear perspective was just one of a number of options available to artists for the creation of fictive space. While Crivelli's use of relief draws upon the principles of low relief sculpture, the combination of paint and relief accentuates the flat picture surface. We see a similar play on figure and ground in Crivelli's use of shadow. While painted shadows backing the figure suggest that divine bodies have a physical substance, the illusion is destroyed by real shadows cast upon the painted surface by relief, or by the *trompe-l'oeil* shadows of flies, cucumbers and festoons that appear to be located on top of the picture. These are just a few examples of the push and pull between art and reality that is a central mechanism of Crivelli's work, enabling the viewer to transcend the material conditions of the picture towards an imaginative realm.

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<sup>112</sup> As noted by Muller, who uses the horses of San Marco in Venice, whose surfaces were incised to scatter light, as an example. Muller, "In a New Light," 155.

<sup>113</sup> Roland Betancourt, "The Icon's Gold: A Medium of Light, Art, and Space," *West 86<sup>th</sup>: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 23, no. 2 (2016): 252-80.

<sup>114</sup> On the apotropaic function of the halo, see Schulz, "Intricate Letters," 79-81.

Crivelli's pictures not only employ spatial effects inspired by low relief sculpture, they also absorb some of the efficacious potential of statues, reliquaries and icons — the media of the most authoritative sacred images — by making reference to their materials and forms. Jeffery Hamburger has suggested that Jan Van Eyck's images deliberately utilise a sculptural mode, noting that "from at least the tenth century (and perhaps even earlier) until well into the later Middle Ages, sacred imagery in Northern Europe was, with few exceptions, three-dimensional imagery: sculpture and, more specifically, reliquaries."<sup>115</sup> The sculptural mode resonated in the religious imagination for its capacity to solicit the haptic senses of the beholder, bringing the divine within physical reach.<sup>116</sup> I would suggest that Crivelli's images can also be understood in terms of these expectations. While his full-length figures adorned with real jewels within the restricted niches of his polyptychs assert their corporeal presence before the viewer, registering more as *simulacra* than *imagines*, the *pastiglia* sheathes covering the London and Bergamo Madonnas act as evidence of their performative power, by suggesting visual parallels with reveted Byzantine icons such as the one brought to Fermo by Giacomo della Marca.

Crivelli's paintings thus take on the qualities of various authoritative media, according to their intended purpose. However, their capacity to channel the power of these media towards a pictorial realm also asserts their superiority as objects, both in facture and in their ability to assist the beholder to embark on an imaginative journey. For unlike cult statues and reliquaries, Crivelli's art affords itself a degree of paradox, as seen in his treatment of the halo as a physical object. As this chapter has shown, relief in Crivelli is so much more than just a slavish repetition of the previous generation of artists in Venice. It produces a subtle commentary on the nature of pictorial representation, taking the viewer on spiritual journey from the physical world towards an imaginative realm. As a technique, it therefore assists Crivelli's paintings to fulfil their function as religious images — according to Gregory the Great's dictum — to show the invisible through the visible: "*per visibilia invisibilia demonstramus.*"<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Hamburger, "Seeing and Believing," 51.

<sup>116</sup> Jung, "The Tactile and the Visionary," 203-240.

<sup>117</sup> For the citation and the bibliography relating to it, see Krüger, "Medium and Imagination," 75; n. 54.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Painted Worlds: Artifice and the Limits of Representation**

The larger part of this thesis has explored three-dimensional relief in Crivelli's work, and the ways in which it draws upon the conditions of artistic media other than painting. In this chapter, I turn to the medium of painting itself, arguing that Crivelli often avoided devices such as perspective and oil that attempt to mimic the optical effects experienced in reality. Instead, he chose artifice in order to uncover invisible truths about reality. A thread that runs through this final part of the thesis concerns the comparison between reality and representation, human and divine, and the beginning of this chapter continues to probe at how the two spheres coexist in Crivelli's work. I will then examine the properties of egg tempera and the role medium plays in Crivelli's rhetoric for picturing the divine. Like tempera, hard-edged contours imply the presence of the infinite beyond the finite domain of the picture. I conclude by suggesting that the creative act embodied by Crivelli's works can be understood as an analogy for divine creation itself.

#### **Crivelli's coincidence of opposites**

At the time when Crivelli was active, Christians believed that God's presence could be felt and seen on earth. Theologically speaking, humans and nature were God's creation; men and women were made in the image of God, and God himself became fully human in Christ. In *I libri della famiglia* (1434), Alberti explained that "nature, that is God, made man a composite of two parts, one celestial and divine, the other most beautiful and noble among mortal things."<sup>1</sup> So too did the liturgy show that God's presence could be felt on earth: the transformed host could be seen and tasted; relics and images of the saints, Virgin and Child could perform miracles. The faithful were invited to enter into a personal dialogue with God more than ever before, marking a rupture with an earlier period when contact with the divine was a privilege reserved for monks and members of the clergy.<sup>2</sup> Religious devotion and ritual took place at home, as well as in churches;<sup>3</sup> popular spiritual handbooks such as the thirteenth-century *Meditations on the Life of Christ* by an unknown Franciscan author

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Carman, *Leon Battista Alberti*, 83.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Belting, *The Image and its Public*, 18, 24-7; Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 15-16;

<sup>3</sup> Maya Corry, Deborah Howard and Mary Laven, eds., *Madonnas and Miracles: The Holy Home in Renaissance Italy* (London and New York: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2017), exhibition catalogue, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, 9-45.

taught the reader how to relive the gospels in their imagination and follow Christ's example;<sup>4</sup> while images of the the Man of Sorrows were pervasive and encouraged the viewer to empathise emotionally with Christ's suffering.<sup>5</sup> In the words of Richard Trexler, "the sacred was very much in and about this world."<sup>6</sup>

There is no better example of Crivelli's works that demonstrates this belief than the *Annunciation with Saint Emidius* (1486; **fig. 2**).<sup>7</sup> The subject matter seamlessly combines a civic event — the arrival of the papal bull that would grant Ascoli independence from Rome — with a supernatural and sacred occurrence, namely, the moment of the impregnation of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. The events unfold on the streets of Ascoli, Crivelli's adopted town, yet it is a transfigured, celestial Ascoli, whose elaborate friezes and opulent marble façades contrast with the grey travertine stone towers of the real Ascoli, held as a model by Emidius, the town's patron saint.<sup>8</sup> The coexistence of human and divine are continuously evoked by the painting. Like many of Crivelli's works, the sacred figures are shown in the foreground while normal people go about their daily business in the background.<sup>9</sup> Aside from us, the viewers, the Archangel Gabriel and Saint Emidius are the only figures aware of the Virgin's presence beyond the solid brick wall that runs down the middle of the image, which is perforated by a barred window through which Gabriel directs his salutation and the gilded opening in the frieze above, penetrated by the Holy Spirit. In the background, we see a scholar in his brown robes and red cap walking down the street, and a woman to his left under the arch behind carrying a basket on her head. In the distance, a young noble woman is accompanied by a chaperone, as she is looked at by two young men in conversation by the other barred opening in the painting. A man stands on the steps beneath the triumphal arch, and looks up, shielding his eyes from the shard of golden light that has burst from the opening in the sky. On the arch above, a notary receives a notification from a messenger, perhaps of the *Libertas Ecclesiastica* that is the dual subject of the painting.<sup>10</sup> The figures standing on the outside staircase to the left are Franciscans, plausibly the very ones that commissioned the altarpiece, and are shown appropriately in

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>5</sup> William L. Barcham and Catherine R. Puglisi, *New Perspectives on the Man of Sorrows*, Studies in Iconography: Themes and Variations (Kalamazoo: Medieval Inst. Publ., 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Trexler, "Florentine Religious Experience," 9.

<sup>7</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 323-331.

<sup>8</sup> On Ascoli transfigured, See Ch. One, 37-8.

<sup>9</sup> For a full description of the figures, their identities and actions, see Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 341-342.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

the middle foreground as the closest earthly beings to the sacred figures.<sup>11</sup> An elegantly clothed man in red (Crivelli himself?) converses with them, while his son peeps around the wall to witness the arrival of Gabriel and Emidius.<sup>12</sup> One is reminded of Alberti's conditions for "plentiful variety:" "I would say that a picture was richly varied if it contained a properly arranged mixture of old men, youths, boys, matrons, maidens, children, domestic animals, dogs, birds, horses, sheep, buildings and provinces; and I would praise any great variety, provided it is appropriate to what is going on in the picture."<sup>13</sup>

In Crivelli's varied composition, earthly and sacred beings cohabit the same space alongside an array of other opposing details. The Holy Spirit finds its counterpart in the humbler birds that variously perch on wooden ledges, emerge from the crevices of buildings and are captive in cages. Resplendent façades contrast with the decaying brick wall behind the Franciscans and the crumbling but newly repaired turret in the distance. The classical, pagan past is concurrent with the dawn of the New Testament at the moment of Christ's Incarnation. Signs of Ascoli's illustrious history are found in the portrait roundel depicting an emperor embedded in the triumphal arch, architecture such as the arch itself and the friezes; the relief in the frieze behind the peacock appears to recall the Roman sculpture depicting the Boy Struggling with a Goose, which was famous at the time.<sup>14</sup> Various symbolic details for the Virgin also hint at the classical past, such as the sieve on the shelf under the plates in the Virgin's house (**fig. 63**), which references the Vestal Virgin Tuccia,<sup>15</sup> and the peacock, which is a symbol for the Roman Goddess of childbirth and marriage, Juno.<sup>16</sup> Elements such as these represent religious renewal in the form of Christianity's triumph over pagan antiquity.

However, perhaps the most extraordinary coincidence of opposites in Crivelli's *Annunciation* is in the modes of viewing which the painting engenders. As several scholars have argued, vision itself is thematised by Crivelli's *Annunciation*.<sup>17</sup> The spatial clash between

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<sup>11</sup> Lightbown suggests that the one closest to the viewer is Fra Bernardino Ferretti of Ancona, the cousin of Gabriele Ferretti, who was *guardiano* of the convent of San Niccolò, where the painting was originally housed. Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 324-5.

<sup>12</sup> Crivelli had a young son, who died a year after this painting was completed. Coltrinari, "Regesto," 196, doc. 120.

<sup>13</sup> Alberti, *On Painting*, 75.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Golsenne, "L'Annonciation de Carlo Crivelli et le problème de l'ornement," *Studiolo 1* (2002): 163-4.

<sup>15</sup> See Ch. 2, 91-2.

<sup>16</sup> I would like to thank Susanna Avery-Quash for pointing this out.

<sup>17</sup> Louis Marin, *Opacité de la peinture: Essais sur la représentation au Quattrocento* (Paris: Usher, 1989), 135; Daniel Arasse, *L'Annonciation italienne. Une histoire de perspective* (Paris: Hazan, 1999), 188-194; Randolph, *Touching Objects*, 82-84; Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 58-59; Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 88-89; 211-12.

the composition's illusionistic perspective and the ray of gold leaf that transverses the scene, whose dependence upon the flat surface of the panel renders the painted illusion impossible, act as an analogy for the paradox of a painting that purports to represent the unfigurable. Adrian Randolph sees in the two barred openings a similar analogy for the impossibility of vision.<sup>18</sup> The barred window that is depicted obliquely in the foreground, demonstrating Crivelli's successful rendition of a geometric structure in space, is a partial barrier for Gabriel's vision, which seeks to penetrate the Virgin's house but is blocked not only by the bars, but also by a potted plant, perhaps a reference to the enclosed garden that symbolises Mary's virginity. The other barred opening is in the turreted wall of the background, where the orthogonal lines of the composition meet; it puts a stop to the composition's receding perspective, which guides our vision until the perforated barrier in the wall.<sup>19</sup> It is in such voided spaces, which feature in numerous *Annunciation* scenes, such as Piero della Francesca's *Sant'Antonio Altarpiece* (c.1470; **fig. 166**), that Daniel Arasse believed the transcendence of the subject matter is most successfully conveyed.<sup>20</sup> I would add that the barred openings in Crivelli's *Annunciation* can be seen to represent two types of vision: the spiritual vision of the sacred beings, and the corporeal vision of the viewer. However, the painting actively precludes either type of vision from penetrating the openings, which brings our attention once again to the impossibility of the illusion, and the painter's skill at crafting it.

As Arasse first observed, Crivelli's *Annunciation*, and other examples like Piero della Francesca's *Sant'Antonio Altarpiece*, encapsulate the mystery of the Incarnation that was expressed in a series of oxymorons by San Bernardino of Siena in a sermon of 1425.<sup>21</sup> It is very likely that Crivelli and his audiences were aware of the way in which Bernardino conceived of the paradoxical moment of the Incarnation, perhaps via a sermon delivered by one of Bernardino's Franciscan followers in Ascoli, such Giacomo della Marca.<sup>22</sup> "When Christ became flesh," declared Bernardino,

eternity entered time, immensity entered the measurable, the Creator entered the created, God – man, life – death, bliss – misery, tranquillity – grief, the incorruptible – the corruptible, the unfigurable – the figure, the unnarratable – discourse, the inexplicable – the word, the uncircumscribable – place, the invisible – the visual, the

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<sup>18</sup> Randolph, *Touching Objects*, 82-84. For a response to Randolph's theory, see Wright, *Frame Work*, 194-6.

<sup>19</sup> Randolph, *Touching Objects*, 81-82.

<sup>20</sup> Arasse, *L'Annonciation Italienne*, 45.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 11-12.

<sup>22</sup> As suggested by Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 211.

inaudible – sound, the unsmellable – smell, the untastable – taste, the impalpable entered the tangible [. . .] and glory into confusion.”<sup>23</sup>

Bernardino’s sermon highlights that the Annunciation was the moment at which the impossible happened: The Word became Flesh, and Christ became human. What may therefore seem surprising is that painters began experimenting with linear perspective — a scientific representational system — when depicting this supernatural event, at almost precisely at the same moment of Bernardino’s sermon.<sup>24</sup> Science — the discovery of the natural world — and theology — the discovery of God — were not mutually exclusive in the fifteenth century. How best to explain this visual juncture of theology and science? Charles Carman has explored linear perspective not only as a tool for implementing a system that enabled greater naturalism, but also as a way of linking the empirical world with God’s infinite nature.<sup>25</sup> For Carman, Nicholas of Cusa’s influential “Coincidence of Opposites,” a theory which the theologian began to develop in the late 1430s in his *De Docta Ignorantia*, is “a notion that embraces metaphorically ways of bridging the divide between finite and infinite reality.”<sup>26</sup> This dialectic was expressed later by Cusa in his *De Visione Dei* (1453), in which he explained that in God, “the finite is united to the Infinite and the ununitable; and the Incomprehensible is apprehended with eternal enjoyment,” a pair of paradoxes that recalls Bernardino’s sermon.<sup>27</sup> The vanishing point, or void, which for Arasse expressed God’s transcendence, is, similarly, for Carman an expression of God’s infinity, while the painted scene itself is a locus for finite reality.

*The Annunciation with Saint Emidius* is the only painting in which Crivelli employed linear perspective on a large scale, suggesting that he was aware not only of this traditionally Florentine way of representing the Annunciation, but also of the dialectical tension at play in the subject matter. However, as a theologically-sensitive and highly imaginative artist, it is difficult to imagine that Crivelli would not have engaged with the paradox of the Incarnation in other ways through his work. Perspective was just one way of expressing a coincidence of opposites in painting. *The Annunciation* is an amalgam of a range of opposites, in the dialectical clash of paint and gold leaf, the *trompe-l’oeil* cucumber on the pictorial threshold that disrupts the receding perspective, as well as merging of past and present, splendour and decay, divine bodies and human bodies. Even the homogeneity of perspective itself is

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<sup>23</sup> Translated from the Latin in Randolph, *Touching Objects*, 78.

<sup>24</sup> Marin, “Annonciations toscans,” in *Opacité de la peinture*, 125-163; Arasse, *L’Annonciation Italienne*.

<sup>25</sup> Carman, *Leon Battista Alberti and Nicholas Cusanus*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>27</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, *De visione dei*, 36.

compromised by Crivelli's asymmetrical composition, in which a wall, positioned just to the right of the centre, jarringly cuts down the middle of the scene so that the viewer sees a concrete structure on the right and receding space on the left.

Like perspective's vanishing point, I argue that Crivelli's disruption of natural vision points towards the finite world of the painting as a way of comprehending God's infinity. We might therefore say that he employs what Hans Belting has called "psychological perspective:" a spiritual way of seeing that emphasises God's infinity by mirroring it in a contradictory painted world, which does not obey the optical laws of reality.<sup>28</sup> The dissemblant painted world, to use Georges Didi-Huberman's terminology, enabled the viewer to become an active participant, who probes at what is represented in the image and in doing so completes it.<sup>29</sup> Belting calls this the "open reference system." A painting that is dissemblant from reality is, according to Belting, "bound to an external viewer," who therefore becomes involved in interpreting the image as they attempt to make sense of what they see based on their knowledge of the natural world.<sup>30</sup> The rupture in the parapet, the fly, *pastiglia*, *trompe-l'oeil* fruits, these are all devices that encourage the viewer to probe, ask questions, and wonder at the impossible apparition of the holy beings.

## Making strange

In an essay titled *Art as Technique* (1917), literary theorist Victor Shklovsky coined the term "*ostranenie*," which translates as "defamiliarisation," or "making strange."<sup>31</sup> Shklovsky argued that the purpose of art is to represent known objects and situations in an unfamiliar way so as to enhance our perception of them. According to Shklovsky,

[. . .] art exists so that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar," to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object [. . .].<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Belting, *The Image and its Public*, 53-4.

<sup>29</sup> Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico*.

<sup>30</sup> Belting, *The Image and its Public*, 53-4.

<sup>31</sup> Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," in *Russian Formalist Criticisms: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 3-24. I want to thank Naomi Vogt for introducing me to Shklovsky's essay.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

Shklovsky's essay presents art as an active agent with a specific goal. According to his theory, the effect of familiarity from repeated encounters with the same objects and situations causes us to stop seeing and perceiving them for what they really are. He writes, "Habitualisation devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife and the fear of war."<sup>33</sup> For Shklovsky, the role of art is to recover an authentic perception of objects and situations by provoking wonder, which ultimately leads to enhanced knowledge. The ability to grasp what is peculiar or particular about an object cannot be achieved from a passive encounter with it in everyday life, but requires an artificial staging in which the essence of the object is multiplied, so that we see it as if for the first time.

The concept of *ostranenie* is an especially useful way of understanding Crivelli's work, and is just one example whereby a methodology usually applied to modern and contemporary art can be used productively for interpreting his pictures. For example, Audrey Flack saw Crivelli's use of space and the picture plane as comparable to the Cubists. She wrote, "It is as if for a moment Crivelli stepped out of his place in time and dealt with ideas which were not touched upon again for five centuries."<sup>34</sup> I suggest that Shklovsky's claim that art makes "stone stony" is an especially appropriate analogy for Crivelli's work, in which the stoniness of stone is evoked in many paintings by enhancing the qualities that belong to the material: its hardness, its coldness, the way it crumbles, the effect it produces when carved or engraved (for example, **figs. 1-3**).<sup>35</sup> Even Crivelli's egg-tempera medium and wooden support promote the hardness of stone — much more so than oil on canvas — enhanced further by their meticulous execution.<sup>36</sup> It is not only the stoniness of stone that Crivelli's work produces. In *The Coronation of the Virgin*, for example, Crivelli's last known work, (1493; **fig. 119**), the qualities of materials and the way they manifest in life are captured, along with a host of extraneous details that describe how objects perform in a given situation. Although we might think that this level of detail would produce a naturalistic effect, the opposite happens. Objects' physical attributes are heightened to a point that they no longer resemble their referent, so that rings of the wood on Saint Catherine's wheel are so prototypical that they are more characteristic of wood than a real piece of wood is, and the lines and creases in skin, and the bones and sinews of the body, are exaggerated to the point of being symbolic rather than realistic (**fig. 167**). Crivelli's figures are the opposite of idealised, or rather, the ideal that is pursued is not one of physical flawlessness. As Crowe

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Flack, "On Carlo Crivelli," 94. See also Introduction, 23-24; Ch. Four, 133-4.

<sup>35</sup> On Crivelli's signatures in stone, see App. One.

<sup>36</sup> See Ch. Two, 106-7, 118-23.

and Cavacaselle put it in 1871, “His figures were from the first withered and lean, they were frequently lame and unnatural in movement. A bitter ugliness pervaded faces in which melancholy repose was less habitual than grimace.”<sup>37</sup> However, they noticed that in his late work, Crivelli “modelled these ill-favoured beings into most tragic and impassioned representations, surprising the spectator by the life which he concentrated into their action and expression.”<sup>38</sup> By exaggerating the body, Crivelli gave his figures a “realistic force”; pronounced veins and bones imply that they are living beings.

To cite Shklovsky, who discusses *ostranenie* in relation to twentieth-century Russian literature, is of course anachronistic, but the technique of distorting reality in order to enhance perception was in fact employed by Crivelli’s patrons. We saw in Chapter Two that *Ad Herennium*, a book of rhetoric then attributed to Marcus Tullius Cicero, was widely read in Dominican *milieu*, and that a copy dating to Crivelli’s time belonged to the library at San Domenico, which once housed two of Crivelli’s polyptychs. The kinds of images recommended for stimulating the memory in *Ad Herennium* are strikingly similar to Shklovsky’s definition of art: “When we see in everyday life things that are petty, ordinary, and banal, we generally fail to remember them, because the mind is not being stirred by anything novel or marvellous [. . .] while the striking and the novel stay longer in mind.”<sup>39</sup> If the purpose of art for Shklovsky was to enhance our perception of reality, for Tullius images that showed the extraordinary could trigger a response in the viewer, making their message stick in the mind. By making the familiar strange, Crivelli stirred the viewer into becoming an active participant in the image, as they focused their devotions upon the incomprehensible, paradoxical sacred subject.

## **Cogent irrelevancies**

Crivelli’s inclusion of what Norman Bryson has called “cogent irrelevancies,” details extraneous to the subject that stake a claim for realism, is a device that relates to *ostranenie*.<sup>40</sup> Timothy McCall discussed the term in a conference paper on Crivelli’s representations of clothing, in which he noted that the red fabric that creases at Saint Venantius’s knees in the triptych for San Domenico in Camerino (1482) is slightly worn and

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<sup>37</sup> Crowe and Cavacaselle, *A History of Painting in North Italy*, 1:65.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Anon, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 36.

<sup>40</sup> Bryson, *Word and Image: French Painting of the Ancien Régime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 18. For an explanation of the term, see pp. 9-18.

bunched up, indicating where it has stretched when the knee is bending (**fig. 168**).<sup>41</sup> This is precisely what would happen if Saint Venantius were a real, moving person. The detail thus asserts a claim for the realism of the scene. Cogent irrelevancies are woven almost imperceptibly into each of Crivelli's paintings. They hint towards the existence of a hidden world, one with its own rules and logic. An example is the edges of things that are observed in minute detail as they disappear from view, such as Saint Peter's orphrey in the same triptych (**fig. 37**). When an image is magnified, the face of a saint and a toe from the orphrey panel above can just be made out, partially obscured by Peter's staff that cuts down the middle (**fig. 169**).<sup>42</sup> As the viewer notices this almost imperceptible detail lurking behind the saint's regalia, they become privy to a reality that exists beyond what it represented, since such information is not necessary to the portrayal of a saint.

In *The Coronation of the Virgin* (1493), the sacred pair are enveloped in impossibly abundant swathes of fabric. They sit upon three different silk cloths, and it is more or less possible to trace where each begins and ends, suggested by the way in which overlapping edges are just in view (**fig. 170**). The cloth-of-honour held up by angels on either side of God the Father hangs behind them and folds onto the seat of the throne, dangling part of the way over it. A different fabric is beneath, feasibly beginning on the seat of the throne, which continues underfoot and dangles over the shell-like base of the throne. To the edge of either side on the base that supports their feet is another piece of fabric with a green trimming, which appears to be beneath the other. The degree to which such details are pursued is not essential in order to convey the event taking place; in a picture, why would a painted Virgin and Christ need to be seated on multiple layers of fabric? Someone must have arranged the fabrics there, in consideration that the honorific cloth behind them was not long enough to protect their feet from the cold marble.

However, there is a point at which such cogent irrelevancies are pursued so far that they no longer make sense, just as the wood of Saint Catherine's wheel is too 'woody' to resemble reality (**fig. 167**). The cloth with the green trimming, for example, has the same colour and design as the cloth that we perceive as on top of it, hanging over the base of the throne. However, due to these similarities it is not clear whether it is actually the same cloth, which has been folded, or a different piece of cloth that happens to have the same pattern and colour. This ambivalence is also encouraged by the lack of indication as to where this cloth begins or ends, and that it seems flush with the frieze beneath it in an impossible way.

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<sup>41</sup> McCall, "Carlo Crivelli and the Centrality of Ornament" (conference paper, The Renaissance Society of America Annual Meeting, Berlin, 26 March 2015).

<sup>42</sup> I want to thank Julien Domercq for drawing my attention to this detail.

What initially appears to be convincing detail therefore reveals itself as artifice. This is an example of the picture “declaring itself painted,” to use the phrase of the humanist Guarino of Verona (1374-1460), who lauded the life-like qualities of a *St. Jerome* sent to him by Pisanello, despite the painting’s obvious artifice.<sup>43</sup>

Another instance where this occurs is in the representation of Saint Stephen’s dalmatic in the larger altarpiece for San Domenico in Ascoli (1476; **fig. 91**). The orphrey — the square patch embroidered with gold thread on front of the dalmatic — has a *pastiglia* cord border that seems to be a continuation of the collar, or amice. Both are of the same material, and there is cord running from the shoulders to the orphrey that appears to connect them. However, the orphrey is sewn onto the dalmatic, whereas the amice is detachable, according to the rules of costume of the period.<sup>44</sup> The toggles with tassels that hang over the orphrey should be attached to the amice, but they appear to emerge from nowhere, as here the cord to which they are attached is painted green, heightened with gold, rather than of *pastiglia* like the collar. The different types of cord, rendered in paint and with *pastiglia* in various ways, resemble each other closely and thus cause confusion as to which element of the vestment connects to which. We are reminded of Botticelli’s *Venus and Mars*, in which the collar of Venus’s dress is rendered with a golden plait that is ostensibly also her hair (**fig. 171**). The effect leaves us wondering about the authenticity of the representation, but the level of detail stakes a claim in favour of truth.

It is unlikely that the viewers of Crivelli’s painting on the upper tier of the high altarpiece at San Domenico would have noticed the small inaccuracy of Stephen’s vestments. However, the fact remains that it is there, in no less concrete a way than the tiny people that can just be made out standing in the doorway of the church held by Saint Thomas Aquinas in the same altarpiece (**fig. 65**), or the letters punched into the gold leaf of the ring worn by Louis of Toulouse in the altarpiece for Montefiore dell’Aso (c.1470-3; **fig. 66**). Crivelli’s paintings are polysemous: aspects of them would have been grasped by his original viewers, others by us today, but much only by Crivelli himself. As such, a painting becomes an analogy for the inaccessible divine, since, as Nicholas of Cusa said, “God is not knowable either in this world or in the world to come [ . . . ] but is known only to Himself.”<sup>45</sup> While on the one hand,

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<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Michael Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators: Humanist observers of painting in Italy and the discovery of pictorial composition, 1350-1450* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), 92.

<sup>44</sup> As noted in written communication from the costume historian, Jane Bridgeman, whom I want to thank. Bridgeman refers me to Fra Angelico’s depiction of Saint Laurence, who was also a deacon, in the Cappella Niccolina frescoes in the Vatican (1447-9), where the amice with its tassels is visibly separate from the dalmatic. (Bridgeman, email to the author, 6 June 2018.)

<sup>45</sup> Cusa, *On Learned Ignorance*, I, 26: 46.

then, only Crivelli retained the keys that could unlock the meaning of his paintings, on the other, his intellectual ownership acts as a productive comparison with the barrier between the viewer's world and the sacred beyond.<sup>46</sup>

Like shadows, impossible details stake a claim for the veracity of the image; and yet, just like shadows, which are cast both by real relief and apparently by painted *trompe-l'oeil* elements onto the surface of the panel, they simultaneously deny the illusion that they initially seem to create.<sup>47</sup> Unlike a naturalistic painting, Crivelli's works do not depict a familiar reality, but an unfamiliar reality. His paintings are windows onto a world, but one in which the rules of our world are recombined so that what appears at first as recognisable is in fact foreign. Other than a small group of paintings, including *The Annunciation*, which depict our world transfigured by divine presence, most of Crivelli's paintings depict a celestial reality. This foreign reality is almost within reach of the viewer's comprehension, but the painting puts a stop to recognition with elements such as impossible vestments or the clash of gold and paint.

## Tempera as device

Previous chapters have shown that Crivelli's paintings have agency, and that individual components, such as orphreys, books and *pastiglia* ornaments, each have unique roles. No element — aesthetic or iconographic— is gratuitous, or without meaning; each is meticulously planned and executed for specific reasons. To this end, I argue that Crivelli used tempera as a device and exploited its characteristics for the purpose of his work.

Egg tempera is made by mixing ground pigment in water to form a paste with an equal amount of egg, often just the white but sometimes the yolk too.<sup>48</sup> As a medium, tempera is fast-drying, even with the inclusion of oil, which has various implications for its preparation and application. Colours must be mixed prior to application, since they cannot be blended on the support, and the painter must be careful to mix the right amount of colour required for the area in question, since once the medium has been combined with the pigment, it will not keep. Smooth transitions between tones can be achieved only by building up many small brushstrokes known as hatching. Delicate hatching also prevents premature cracking and flaking that would result from thickly applied paint. The laborious preparation

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<sup>46</sup> On the painting as a barrier or bridge to the sacred, see Ch. Two, 91-4; Conclusion, 207-8.

<sup>47</sup> On Crivelli's shadows, See Ch. Four, 143-6.

<sup>48</sup> Jill Dunkerton et al., *Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in The National Gallery* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press; London: National Gallery Publications Ltd., 1991), 188.

and execution of tempera produces a durable surface, which preserves the stability of pigments better than oil. As Jill Dunkerton noted, “Paintings in the National Gallery executed in egg tempera are often astonishingly well preserved, especially considering that they include the oldest works in the Collection.”<sup>49</sup> In terms of appearance, colour is lustrous and surfaces are opaque, flat and matte, due to tempera’s low refraction and high chroma.<sup>50</sup> Hatching draws attention to the surface of the panel and records every physical movement of execution; it is the opposite of the free, expressive brushwork that characterises sixteenth-century Venetian painting.

The properties of tempera would have informed Crivelli’s practice, imposing certain conditions on his working methods that had a widespread impact on the pictorial result. But it can also be said that the medium was particularly suited to Crivelli’s concept of painting as a meticulously crafted object with an immaculate finish. According to Dunkerton, Crivelli “can be said to have made a positive virtue of the need for a hatched application of the paint.”<sup>51</sup> His *Dead Christ with Angels*, originally the *cimasa* of the Montefiore dell’Aso altarpiece (c.1470-3), is believed to be one of the few extant paintings executed in tempera with an original varnish (**fig. 130**).<sup>52</sup> Where the paint has been undisturbed, every brushstroke is perfectly preserved, enabling us to admire his consummate technical skill, particularly in the left-hand Angel’s face, where each plane is described through smooth tonal transitions made possible with meticulous hatching (**fig. 172**).

Traditionally, Crivelli’s use of tempera on panel is seen as a sign of his reliance upon traditional methods and a lack of interest in experimenting with oil or canvas, unlike many of his contemporaries, including Bellini, Mantegna and Cosmé Tura. As early as 1871, Crowe and Cavalcaselle commented that Crivelli “clings to tempera with a desperate fondness at a time when all painters were trying oils [ . . . ].”<sup>53</sup> It is likely that Crivelli had seen paintings executed in oil, perhaps Northern examples in Venice or Giovanni Bellini’s Pesaro altarpiece (Museo Civico, Pesaro), which probably arrived in the Marche at some point in the 1470s.<sup>54</sup> However, he would have required some instruction on how to use oils in order to avoid unsuccessful experiments (think of Piero della Francesca’s early attempts), and for a mature artist that had become a master of tempera, this may not have been desirable. Certainly,

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>50</sup> Anne Dunlop, “On the Origins of European Painting Materials, Real and Imagined,” in Anderson, Dunlop and Smith, *The Matter of Art*, 75.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>52</sup> Dunkerton and White, “The Discovery and Identification of an Original Varnish,” 70-6.

<sup>53</sup> Crowe and Cavalcaselle, *A History of Painting in North Italy*, 1:86.

<sup>54</sup> See Ch. Four, 145 n. 58.

Crivelli incorporated oils into his medium, but it is not clear whether this was for visual effect or technical reasons, and it was only a small modification to his tempera technique.<sup>55</sup>

Much has been written on the virtues of oil and its capacity to recreate optical effects seen in the natural world.<sup>56</sup> The transition from egg to oil is heralded as a turning point in the history of painting, liberating painters from the confines of their medium and opening up infinite possibilities for mimetic expression.<sup>57</sup> It has been interpreted as signalling the transition of the painter from craftsman to genius, whose labour was now hidden rather than exposed by the product of their art. For unlike oil, which can be blended to conceal brushstrokes, egg tempera records the painter's every motion, making the finished work of art a visible product of their labour. Identified as the technique of early Italian painters working in the tradition of Cennino, tempera is often described as distinctive for its slow drying time and the brilliance with which pigment is revealed and preserved by it. However, rarely has it been proposed that a painter might have knowingly chosen tempera over oil for aesthetic reasons. Crivelli was not the only artist to do so. Recent medium analysis on Mantegna's paintings demonstrates that he continued to use tempera throughout his career.<sup>58</sup> As with Crivelli, tempera complemented Mantegna's preference for crisply uniform surfaces. But Mantegna increasingly came to prefer canvas as a support over panel, which Crivelli never used. For Crivelli, the panel's hard surface was an important quality, as it defined the painting as a concrete boundary. Crivelli made a positive virtue of the limitations of tempera on panel, using it to explore the boundaries between pictorial representation and the comparably infinite possibilities of nature. I will argue that Crivelli exploited the properties of tempera on panel to realise similar goals to the experts of the oil medium, but with radically different results.

Crivelli makes pictorial surface a protagonist in his work. The painted support is treated as membrane between the space of the viewer and that of the sacred beings, which

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<sup>55</sup> See Ch. Three, 118-19.

<sup>56</sup> Recent studies include Marjolijn Bol, "Oil and the Translucent: Varnishing and glazing in practice, recipes and historiography, 1100-1600," (PhD diss., Utrecht University, 2012); Lehmann, "The Matter of the Medium," 27-36.

<sup>57</sup> This is despite the fact that oil was used in Europe as early as the thirteenth century; for example, the Westminster Retable (c.1270-80) was painted in oils. See Raymond White and Jo Kirby, "Medium analysis," in Binski and Massing, *The Westminster Retable*, 252-59. The beginning of oil painting in Italy has been mythologized by writers since Vasari, and there are many inaccuracies to such accounts.

<sup>58</sup> Jill Dunkerton and Babette Hartwig, "Mantegna and Bellini: Contrasting Approaches to Technique," in *Mantegna and Bellini*, eds. Caroline Campbell et al. (London: National Gallery Company, 2019), exhibition catalogue, National Gallery, London and Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 51-66.

is sometimes shattered by objects protruding outwards (or inwards?) (**fig. 2**),<sup>59</sup> or otherwise reinforced by insects and honorific festoons apparently belonging to our world that cast shadows upon the painted image (**fig. 11**). Three-dimensional relief applied to the support enters into dialogue with flat areas of paint (**fig. 135**); gold leaf reflects light sources external to the image, in turn denying painted illusion (**fig. 13**). In Crivelli's work, the picture surface is anything but invisible, or dissolved by painted illusion. Instead, it is indispensable to the representational and devotional mechanism of each painting. Tempera plays an important role in giving surface agency. Due to the thousands of visible brushstrokes that make up a painting, as soon as the viewer moves close, they notice that the image is painted onto a flat support (**fig. 172**). The brushstrokes therefore deny the illusion of the sacred subject. As a result, naturalism is limited by tempera.

The negation of illusion is a central goal in Crivelli's art, achieved through various devices including dissonant scales and clashing systems of representation. I would argue that tempera can be seen as such a device, employed in a way that contributes to a denial of the apparition of the sacred subject. However, there is a curious disjuncture between keenly observed detail and the crafted surface produced by Crivelli's technique. While on the one hand, hair, for example, is observed in its complexity, with every curl and segment carefully painted (**fig. 173**), purporting realistic representation, on the other, it appears closer to the drilled stone hair of a sculpture than it does the hair of a real human (**fig. 174**). Skin and fabric are skilfully modelled to appear three-dimensional and voluminous, and yet their surfaces seem hard, immaculate and artificial, such that they look as if they could fracture. When Crivelli painted cracks into the stone of parapets, which ostensibly appear also as cracks in the surface of his paintings, he may well have been making this very point (**figs. 1, 3**). Tempera enabled Crivelli to achieve a level of crispness that he may have struggled to achieve in oil. As his work advances in time, his technique only becomes crisper, so that in panels such as *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter* (1488; **fig. 21**), complex forms are painstakingly defined with hard outlines and filled with lucid colour. The effect is that objects and figures are seen in striking, graphic relief, but their crafted surfaces also look opaque and artificial, which gives the painted scene a stylised rather than naturalistic appearance. Traditionally, the scholarship describes Crivelli's late style as receding into decadence. In 1961 Anna Bovero gave the most damning assessment: "From 1491 the artist's work underwent a serious decline: his formal vision [. . .] became vulgar. [. . .] The cumbersome,

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<sup>59</sup> On whether Crivelli's cucumbers enter or project from the painting, see Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 138.

crowded *Coronation* of 1493 is a dramatic confession of impotency. [. . .] We have evidently arrived at total desiccation, at the end of an art.”<sup>60</sup> Crivelli’s evolution towards increased artifice can only suggest a deliberate intention to distort reality: for the Venetian master, this was the most sophisticated goal that art could possibly fulfil.

Tempera can, therefore, produce the effect of *ostranenie*, whereby form is convincing and highly realistic, but rather than representing an organic apple, for example, the apple-referent appears instead to be a sculpted one. In the triptych for the Dominicans of Camerino (1482; **fig. 20**), Crivelli seems to have made this very point. Fruit and animal skulls are hung along the dias that the saints stand upon in the two lateral panels to create a frieze decorated with organic matter (**fig. 79**). We are asked to compare this organic frieze to the sculpted one on the level above. Crivelli offers a *paragone* not only between painting and sculpture, but also between organic matter and crafted matter, God’s creation and artistic creation.<sup>61</sup> Crivelli was not the only artist of his generation to imply that his model was sculpture rather than nature: Mantegna was famously criticised by his teacher, Squarcione, for making the flesh of his figures appear like stone.<sup>62</sup> But Crivelli was the only painter to employ the painted support as an analogy for the actual surface of sculpted media. Sculpture is, of course, far more durable than a painted panel. Crivelli’s analogies with sculpture may, therefore, have been intended to make a point about his own artistic legacy, which he appears to have been acutely aware of from the way in which he signed his work.<sup>63</sup>

So while Crivelli’s works “declare themselves painted” through their brushstrokes, they also appear, paradoxically, as solid and finite objects. Hatching reminds us that each painting was made by human hand, but there is little indication of the creative process behind the finished result, and such perfection seems almost impossibly attained. Very few *pentimenti* have been identified in Crivelli’s underdrawings, and when they are present, they are minimal, which tells us that every composition was carefully planned prior to being executed in paint, probably with recourse to cartoons that were transferred onto the prepared panel.<sup>64</sup> None of these cartoons have survived, but a small preparatory drawing for

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<sup>60</sup> Bovero, *Carlo Crivelli*, 47-9. Author’s translation from the Italian. More recently Lightbown described a “failure of vitality” in his late work (Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 392).

<sup>61</sup> See Ch. Six.

<sup>62</sup> As recounted first by Bernardino Scardone in his history of Padua, *De Antiquitate Urbis Patavii* (1560), published in Paul Kristeller, *Andrea Mantegna* (Berlin and Leipzig: Cosmos, 1902), 501-3. Another version of the story was told by Giorgio Vasari (1568): Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull (London: The Folio Society, 1993) 2: 44-5.

<sup>63</sup> See App. One.

<sup>64</sup> Ch. Three, 108-13.

a predella panel of *Saint Peter* is a chance survival (**fig. 105**). It is possible that other drawings were destroyed by Crivelli himself as a way of concealing his steps.<sup>65</sup>

We cannot, therefore, say that Crivelli was a spontaneous artist, nor even perhaps an expressive one. The level of finish to which each element is taken places a veil of artifice over every painted scene. This feature was criticised by Paul Hills recently, who argued that “the equal insistence that Crivelli gave to every descriptive element impeded the imaginative passage from physical to spiritual vision, per *visibilia ad invisibilia*.”<sup>66</sup> However, it seems to me that this insistence on equal description was deliberate and meaningful. The equivalent level of analytical description that Crivelli lavishes on every element prompts, once again, a comparative approach in the viewer, who is not accustomed to seeing a peach or a skull depicted with equal beauty as the face of the Virgin, for example (**fig. 3**). This is one of many instances of Crivelli notifying his viewers of his painting’s fiction, and the impossibility of the apparition of holy figures in painted form.

Although equal description is a feature of every work by Crivelli, it is particularly evident in his later *pale quadre* which contain no relief. *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter* is a series of overlapping, embellished forms consisting largely of fabric (1488; **fig. 21**). Depth is suggested by the layering of figures and objects, and the projection of shadows onto surfaces, although space is deliberately limited and the eye registers the painting’s surface as a flat collection of highly animated detail. A tapestry depicting a scene from the Old Testament story of Esther and Ahasuerus, dating to between 1510 and 1520 and woven in Brussels, produces, I would argue, precisely this effect (**fig. 175**). As well as its striking compositional parallels, the tapestry has visual affinities with Crivelli’s painting. The painted depiction of sumptuous fabrics already connects Crivelli’s painting to the textile medium, but it is the insistence on meticulous, form-flattening description at every level, which produces an affinity with tapestries like the one in the V&A. Weavers cannot increase or minimize the level of detail to produce depth and relief as artists working in painted media can; their medium requires that every surface is treated the same. Paul Taylor has suggested that “there is a sense in which painting with tempera is a little like weaving a tapestry: everything must be carefully prepared beforehand,” an observation that has some bearing upon the

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<sup>65</sup> Some artists seem to have destroyed their drawings. Vasari tells us that before his death in Rome in 1564, Michelangelo “burned a large number of his own drawings, sketches and cartoons so that no one should see the labours he endured and the ways he tested his genius, and lest he should appear less than perfect.” Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 3: 210.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Hills, “Lorenzo Lotto’s Shrouds and Veils,” *Artibus et historiae: an art anthology* 34, no. 68 (2013): 9-28, 24.

present point.<sup>67</sup> Tempera and its preparation both complemented and contributed to the desired aesthetic of Crivelli's paintings, which would eventually inform the viewer's perception of them as art objects of exquisite facture.

## Hard contours

Hard contours define every form of Crivelli's paintings (for example, **fig. 167**). Sharp outlines give his work high definition, and were perhaps favoured since strong tonal contrasts are difficult to achieve with tempera. We can be almost certain that Alberti would have been disdainful of Crivelli's hard contours, based on his opinion that "one should take care that circumscription is done with the finest possible, almost invisible lines [. . .] if it is done with a very visible line, they will look not like the margins of surfaces, but like cracks."<sup>68</sup> Although hard contours were a negative feature for Alberti, it would seem that for the ancients, they were a virtue. We saw in Chapter Two that pagan memory writers, whose texts were heavily consulted by the Dominicans, favoured images that are "solid and sharp" — "*firmae et acres*," — for stimulating recollection, unlike those which are "weak and feeble" — "*inbecillae et infirmae*."<sup>69</sup> Crivelli's pronounced contours, and his tempera technique that emphasises the hard surface of the picture support, produce a sharpened aesthetic that may have appealed to the Dominicans' interest in appropriate memory images, according to the *ars memorandi*.

Pliny the Elder was also an advocate of the hard contour, writing, "[. . .] where an artist is rarely successful is in finding an outline which shall express the contours of the figure [*extrema corporum*]."<sup>70</sup> He continued, "For the contour [*extremitas*] should appear to fold back and so enclose the object as to give the assurance of parts behind, thus clearly suggesting even what it conceals."<sup>71</sup> The silhouettes of forms were, therefore, to be judged for their ability to suggest what was just beyond visible in the work of art. Alison Wright has explored this idea through the work of the Pollaiuolo, suggesting that in *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (1475; **fig. 176**), the contours of the soldiers' legs are displayed from

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<sup>67</sup> Paul Taylor, *Condition: The Aging of Art* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2015), 37.

<sup>68</sup> Alberti, *On Painting*, 65.

<sup>69</sup> Anon, *Ad Herennium*, MS. 198, f.33; cfr. trans. Caplan, 219.

<sup>70</sup> Pliny, *The Elder Pliny's Chapters on the History of Art*, trans. Katharine Jex-Blake (Chicago: Argonaut Inc. Publishers, 1968), 112-13.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

numerous different viewpoints so as to suggest their three-dimensional values within the limits of the two-dimensional picture plane.<sup>72</sup>

The idea of a painting suggesting the existence of something more beyond it, “thus clearly suggesting even what it conceals,” was repeated by Cennino in the introduction to his *Libro dell’Arte*, where he described the profession of painting, “for which imagination and manual dexterity are needed in order to find invisible things hiding in the shadow of ones in nature, and to capture them with your hand, so that you can make manifest that which is not there.”<sup>73</sup> This complex passage, which may have been inspired by a reading of Pliny, presents an interesting interplay between manual execution and cerebral activity. It echoes the purpose of *ostranenie*, which was to represent objects and situations in a new way, so as to reveal previously unnoticed truths about them. And it also can be interpreted theologically, in light of the Christian belief that God, who was Himself invisible, was to be found in every natural form. We may also infer from Cennino’s passage that he was describing a concrete kind of painting, as one that had been made following his exact instructions would be, “captured” by the hand in order to “make manifest” the fictive scene imagined by the painter.

Cennino’s assertion that painting is concerned with the invisible directly contradicts Alberti’s opinion that “no one will deny that things which are not visible do not concern the painter, for he strives to represent only the things that are seen.”<sup>74</sup> For the humanist, painting is an empirical activity that involves recreating as far as possible the perception of three-dimensional reality, in which forms merge softly from one to the next, an optical effect that can be captured on the flat surface through techniques such as *sfumato*. Cennino, on the other hand, who seems to share Pliny’s outlook, frames his introduction to the practice of painting as a prayer, invoking the support of the Holy Trinity, the Virgin, Saint Luke the Evangelist, “the first Christian painter”, his patron saint, Eustace and finally “all of the Saints of Paradise.”<sup>75</sup> For the Christian practitioner, painting is an occupation that involves the artist’s imagination to “find invisible things” about reality that cannot be perceived in every day life; it is a form of knowledge creation that reveals previously unknown truths about God’s creation. In painting, outlines are directly involved in the interplay between visible and invisible. The successfully rendered contour of an object has the capacity to inform the

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<sup>72</sup> Wright, “Dimensional Tension in the Work of the Pollaiuolo,” in *The Sculpted Object 1400-1700*, eds. Stuart Currie and Peta Motture (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1997), 72.

<sup>73</sup> Cennini, *Il Libro dell’Arte*, 1: 20.

<sup>74</sup> Alberti, *On Painting*, 37.

<sup>75</sup> Cennini, *Il Libro dell’Arte*, 1: 20.

viewer of its entire volume, without actually showing it, thereby involving the viewer in the process of ‘completing’ the image with their imagination. This process of discovery is similar to Belting’s theory of the “open reference system” described above, upon which he claims devotional paintings were devised, as opposed to the “closed reference system” of the *istoria*, which did not invoke the viewer’s participation, since the forms were already fully rendered as in reality.<sup>76</sup>

Painting as a medium, therefore, is specifically concerned with both the visible and the invisible, in a way that other media are not. The viewer can experience every dimension of sculpture in the round in the same way that they can experience an object in everyday life.<sup>77</sup> The fact that a three-dimensional sculpted object reveals its every form could therefore be seen as limiting the participation of the viewer’s imagination, in a similar way to a naturalistic painting. By the same token, a work of art that both reveals and conceals its forms would enable the viewer to enter into an engaged dialogue with the sacred subject. The exponents of *rilievo schiacciato*, or ‘squashed’ relief sculpture invented by Donatello, were clearly aware of the transcendental potential of their technique.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, the flat surfaces of Crivelli’s paintings, offset by pronounced contours that indicate but do not reveal form, encourage the viewer’s imaginative completion of an image.

It is particularly in Crivelli’s depictions of hands that the interplay between invisible and visible is evident. As has often been remarked, Crivelli’s hands are highly expressive, elongated and often contorted into unnatural poses. What has been overlooked is that the goal of these poses is to emphasise Christ’s physical body through haptic engagement with it. During the fifteenth century, Christian devotion became increasingly focused upon cultivating an emotional empathy with Christ’s physical suffering, a priority that was expressed and facilitated by visceral paintings of Christ’s body.<sup>79</sup> As well as Crivelli’s emotionally-charged Lamentation scenes, in which Christ’s limp but anatomically insistent body is caressed by the hands of the Magdalene, the Virgin and John the Evangelist (**fig. 72**), depictions of the Christ Child also allude to his corporeality through the articulated hands of the Virgin. In the altarpiece for San Domenico, Camerino, the Virgin holds her child from behind, so that the tips of her fingers can be seen emerging from around his voluminous

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<sup>76</sup> Belting, *The Image and its Public*, 53-4.

<sup>77</sup> On the aesthetic experience of painting vs sculpture, see Robert Hopkins, “Painting, Sculpture, Sight and Touch,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44, no. 2 (2004): 149-66.

<sup>78</sup> See Ch. Four, n. 9, 10.

<sup>79</sup> David Morgan, “Empathy and Sympathy in the History of Visual Piety,” in *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images* (University of California Press, 1999), 59-76. See also Ch. Four, 74, 78-9.

body (**fig. 177**). In the tiny panel made for the sacristy of San Francesco in Ancona, she clutches one of her son's feet in between index finger and thumb, in a way that is both playful, hinting at the human relationship between Mother and Child, and inviting, as she holds it up for the viewer's inspection (**fig. 178**). In the larger altarpiece for San Domenico in Ascoli, the sleeping Christ Child leans upon his Mother's outstretched hand, as he clutches around one of her fingers, conveying a sense of his body weight, while the transparent cloth that the Virgin removes from his body with her other hand is held up to contrast against his corporeality (**fig. 78**). Martina Bagnoli has argued convincingly that the way in which Mary spans Christ's wound with her finger in the Boston *Pietà*, as if she were measuring it, was a way of allowing the viewer to establish a spatial relationship between their own body and Christ's (**fig. 38**).<sup>80</sup> Articulate hands functioned in a similar way, particularly when interweaving with Christ's body so that the parts that were not visible to the viewer could be perceived through tactile engagement. Animated contours of the body were essential for this physical interplay to be effective.

The way in which actual relief functions on the surface of Crivelli's paintings also has important implications for contour and the boundaries of vision. As I discussed in Chapter Four, *pastiglia*, gems, rope and wood are applied to the painted body in a way to suggest its real volume (**fig. 142**). Relief is applied so as to suggest the presence of "that which is invisible."

Although Cennino and Alberti disagreed on painting's relationship to the invisible, they both placed high importance on rendering form so that it is seen in relief.<sup>81</sup> The way in which the artist might achieve this, however, was highly variable. In Crivelli's case, relief is achieved with strongly outlined contours, meticulous hatching to define planes, overlapping, interlocking forms and actual three-dimensional relief, whereas Alberti's ideal artist achieved relief through modelling and "almost invisible" lines, imitating the optical effects of nature. We might imagine that had Alberti known of Leonardo's work, he would have praised it highly, since it was the Florentine polymath who mastered the invisible contour more successfully than any painter before him through the development of a technique known as *sfumato*. The word, for which there is no direct translation, describes forms that emerge gradually from darkness, as if from smoke. Galileo defined *sfumato* as a way of passing "without crudeness from one tone to the next, by which paintings emerge soft and round, with force and relief."<sup>82</sup> In other words, relief was evoked without defined contours, in the

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<sup>80</sup> Bagnoli, "Mary's Measure," 731.

<sup>81</sup> Ch. Four, 139, n. 36.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in Alexander Nagel, "Leonardo and *sfumato*," *Res* 24 (Autumn 1993): 7.

opposite way to Crivelli's method. Alexander Nagel has shown that the goal of Leonardo's *sfumato* was to create three-dimensional relief as it is perceived in reality, through an extreme refinement of the oil technique that eliminated any trace of the artist's workings.<sup>83</sup> Instructing other painters, Leonardo recommended "that your shadows and lights be united without strokes or marks, in the manner of smoke." He also advised that the edges of forms should not be "definite or clear lest your work look wooden as a result."<sup>84</sup>

If we take the *Mona Lisa*, one of the most famous paintings of all time, as an example, we notice that the facial features have no visible lines to define them (**fig. 179**). Even when a high resolution image of the painting is zoomed in very closely on a computer screen, it is impossible to make out any brushstrokes (**fig. 180**). Every form merges imperceptibly from one tone to the next. Aside from the delicate network of craquelure that now covers the surface of the *Mona Lisa*, the support is almost invisible and our vision is absorbed by the image of the female figure seated in a landscape, which we read as receding in space. The opposite happens with Crivelli's *Virgin* in the panel now in the Museo Carrara, Bergamo (**fig. 156**). Not only are facial features distinguished with lines, but tonal transitions are described by the marks of meticulous hatching. The painting appears flat and opaque, and the eye dances across the *pastiglia* surface of the Virgin's gilded mantle, which reads as on top of the wooden panel. Leonardo's painting was made between c.1503 and 1517, and Crivelli's in the late 1470s or early 1480s, but we must remember that Crivelli employed the same techniques until the mid-1490s and Leonardo began to use a form of *sfumato* in his earliest works that date to the 1470s. Chronologically and geographically, their work is not distant, but technically and stylistically it is worlds apart.

Despite these polarities, there are surprising similarities with regards to concept. Both Crivelli and Leonardo refined their medium to its extremity, so that tempera and oil are thematised by their work, but also conquered: both artists are in complete control of their medium and can manipulate its characteristics for their own ends. However, while Leonardo aimed to overcome the physical conditions of painting, Crivelli made these conditions a protagonist.<sup>85</sup> Leonardo was dismissive of the "perspectival painters" of the previous generation, and believed that rather than rays of sight converging at a single point in the eye, vision extends across the entire pupil.<sup>86</sup> Crivelli understood how to employ perspective, but, like Leonardo, rejected or deliberately impaired it, often employing multiple vanishing points

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-20.

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in *ibid.* 11.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-18.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

in his work.<sup>87</sup> In works by both artists, the eye registers a visual impression of an image with multiple points of interest. However, while Leonardo's goal was to recreate the optical laws of nature, Crivelli's was to create new laws belonging to a parallel, celestial reality. Both artists were interested shadow and its possibilities, but if Leonardo's shadows work to dissolve the picture support, Crivelli's shadows comment upon the physical status of the panel. From these differing concepts of shadow arise parallel concepts about the finiteness of painting and the image produced by it. Leonardo's shadows create indistinct contours that seem to continue *ad infinitum* into non visibility. As Nagel has written,

One might say that his painting practice came to embody the "continuous quantities" that it aimed to represent: by becoming infinitely divisible, it became indefinitely extendable; and by continually deferring the moment of finishing, it remained always open to further adjustment.<sup>88</sup>

By contrast, Crivelli's contours are hard, giving every form a finite edge. And yet, that edge is articulated to suggest its three-dimensional values. What is not shown is hinted at through overlapping surfaces that invite the viewer to wonder at what lies beyond the painting. Unlike Leonardo, Crivelli never left a work unfinished. The refinement of his tempera technique and the precision of his design imply that he was a meticulous planner who realised his intentions until completion. Like his contours, which terminate distinctly, Crivelli's practice followed a plan which meant that when his works were finished, they were finished, and when they were not they were not; there was no grey area of completion, like Leonardo's contours. However, like a hard but articulated contour, the finite nature of Crivelli's paintings would not have limited the viewer's capacity to enter high realms of contemplation. The reverse is the case, since by limiting the representation of the sacred subject to its picture support, the viewer is led to a higher understanding of what God is not: "God is not apprehended by reason or by imagination or by the senses; for He surpasses all the sense and all power of reason. Rather, he is apprehended by faith", says Nicholas of Cusa.<sup>89</sup>

That is not to say God's creative powers could not be compared to those of the artist. Cusa himself makes such an analogy, as we shall see in Chapter Six.<sup>90</sup> There has been a tendency since the earliest commentaries on Leonardo to describe his work as divine. Vasari

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<sup>87</sup> See Micheli and Patti, "Pittura in costruzione," 250, figs. 15, 16.

<sup>88</sup> Nagel, "Leonardo and *sfumato*," 16.

<sup>89</sup> Nicolas of Cusa, "Dies sanctificatus," in *Nicholas of Cusa's early sermons: 1430-1441*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Loveland, Colorado: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2003), Sermon 22: 359.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 366-8.

famously opened his *Life of Leonardo*, claiming, “everything he does clearly comes from God rather than from human art.”<sup>91</sup> As Nagel has noted, by dissolving every trace of manual activity through *sfumato*, Leonardo’s work dissociates itself from the hand of an artist and assumes “the status of an autonomous creation,” just as divine creation brings things forth from the abyss.<sup>92</sup> The mystery surrounding Leonardo’s creative act only served, however, to increase his cultic status as an artist. As Vasari tells us, people marvelled at Leonardo’s work when it was created, treating it as a holy relic; and today, people continue to gaze at it in awe through bullet-proof glass within the museum space. There are no contemporary accounts of how people responded to Crivelli’s paintings, although in the contract for his last work, the *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1493 (fig. 92), he is referred to by his patrons as *dominus*, meaning Lord.<sup>93</sup>

By the end of his career, Crivelli had achieved noble status for his art, a recognition that he was in possession of superior faculties to those of normal men.<sup>94</sup> However, the popular response to Crivelli’s art in the fifteenth century can only be judged against popular response to it today, which is one of wonder, particular at the technical mastery of his paintings. While the viewer is in awe of Leonardo’s work for appearing to have been brought forth miraculously, without human intervention, the opposite is true of Crivelli’s. His works present innumerable traces of human touch, from every visible brushstroke of tempera to every motion of tooling in the gold ground. Although his techniques are refined to the point of inspiring wonder, Crivelli did not want his viewers to forget his authorship, explicit from the obsessive way in which he signed his work.<sup>95</sup> While Leonardo’s brushstrokes dissolve, making his paintings appear to be divine creations, Crivelli presents his works’ pictorial conditions as metaphors for divine creation. His aim was not to replicate the laws of nature in his works, since no person or object can be adequate analogies for God and divine creation, according to the theology of the time. Rather, his aim was to create an alternative, paradoxical nature – of which he was master – in order to assist the devotee in envisaging a celestial realm inhabited by the holy beings represented.

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<sup>91</sup> Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 2: 85.

<sup>92</sup> Nagel, “Leonardo and *sfumato*,” 18.

<sup>93</sup> Contract transcribed in Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli*, 315-317; Coltrinari, “Regesto,” doc. 133: 197.

<sup>94</sup> Ames Lewis, *The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artist*, 62-4.

<sup>95</sup> See App. One.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined the ways in which Crivelli's painting technique conditions the viewer's response to his images. It has also shown how his representational style, which explores the tension between reality and fiction in a novel way, relates to theological and art-theoretical concepts of his day, and, in the case of the latter, of modern times. Crivelli's interest in highlighting multiple realities through his work, particularly via the manipulation of his medium, has much in common with modern art. This dispels the myth that modernity represented a clean break from the past, and that artists were experimenting with entirely new ideas. It also enables us to reject, once again, the idea that Crivelli was somehow a conservative painter, laboriously imitating his predecessors, and compels us to acknowledge that he was instead a pioneering visual artist and thinker. Like his use of gold, gems and relief, Crivelli's painting technique is itself a bearer of meaning. The metapictorial, or "the self-staging of painting", plays a central role in Crivelli's art.<sup>96</sup> The artist made real figures emerge from miniature churches held by saints, armour and other previously inanimate objects bear faces, and non-figural ornaments and patterns behave in symphony with figural elements. These elements inform us, the viewer, that we are looking at a work of art. It is, therefore, surely right to see Crivelli's painting technique as contributing to the significance of his images.

I have explored Crivelli's altarpieces as painted worlds, in which elements from the viewer's reality are recombined into an unnaturalistic register. A 'coincidence of opposites' is at play in the tension between extravagant life-like detail and overt artifice. The ambivalence of Crivelli's register, somewhere between reality and fiction, solicits the viewer's imagination in completing the image in a way that a naturalistic painting could not. Artifice challenges the viewer's perceptions, forcing them to contemplate the incomprehensible sacred subject with deeper intensity. In later *pale quadre*, such as *The Coronation of the Virgin* (fig. 119), I demonstrated that 'cogent irrelevancies' imply the existence of a celestial reality inhabited by the holy beings depicted. By making the familiar strange, such as representing segments of hair as drilled in stone, or bodies with pronounced veins and contorted postures, Crivelli extracts the essence out of natural forms, enhancing the viewer's perception of them and prompting a reflection on the subject matter. He fulfils Cennino's call upon painters "to find invisible things hiding in the shadow of ones in nature, and to capture them with your hand, so that you can make manifest that which is not there." With his hand, Crivelli made

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<sup>96</sup> Pericolo, "What is Metapainting?," 12.

innumerable marks with the hatched application of tempera, capturing artificial forms on the flat picture support. He pursued the conditions of painting to the point that medium becomes a protagonist and the “picture declares itself painted.” However, the limits of painting also hint at the presence of something beyond, just as the articulated contour of two-dimensional form can suggest its three-dimensional values.

## Chapter Six

### ***“ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione”*: An Alternative Naturalism**

In a sermon preached in Augsburg on Christmas day of 1440, Nicholas of Cusa compared nature, the divine art, to human art. He asked his congregation to consider the idea,

that the higher and more perfect an art is, the more it enfolds within itself the lower arts, just as the art of a goldsmith enfolds the art of a painter, a sculptor, a foundry-man, etc.: therefore, [the art of the goldsmith is] nobler because its simplicity is stronger and more unified. But, necessarily, the Infinite Art is the strongest and most powerful. Consider, too, that an artisan produces various things from a single art; and the more things he produces, the greater and more powerful is his art. By comparison, the Divine Art is undepletable.<sup>1</sup>

Nicholas of Cusa’s analogy suggests that in the time of Crivelli, artists who drew upon numerous different artistic media were superior makers, in possession of powers that resembled, though did not match, the infinite variety of nature.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the art that Cusa may have known suggests that Crivelli’s paintings might have come close to fulfilling the powerful union of the arts he described. Although he was referencing goldsmithing specifically, which in any case is an important analogy in Crivelli’s work, it is possible that Byzantine relief icons, which he may have seen during his trip to Constantinople just a few years prior to delivering the sermon, and paintings that represent or draw on the qualities of textiles, metalwork and sculpture, such as the work of the Master of the Life of the Virgin (active second half of 15<sup>th</sup> century), who painted Cusa’s portrait as part of the *Passion Triptych* in the St. Nikolaus-Hospital, Bernkastel-Kues, Germany, also informed his ideas. Cusa’s comparison between the artist’s products and God’s natural creation was a trope in both religious and humanist writings of the late medieval and early modern period. Dante (1265-1321) established a hierarchy of creation in canto X of *Purgatory*, listing the artist Polykleitos as second only to Nature.<sup>3</sup> Describing Giotto, Boccaccio (1313-75) wrote that “whatever Nature might produce [. . .] he was able to imitate it, or rather, to make his work resemble the thing itself [. . .].”<sup>4</sup> Alberti also emphasised that painting imitated nature, but his concept of naturalism was much wider than this. He believed that painting was an

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<sup>1</sup> Cusa, “Sermon XXII,” 366.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Martin Schmidt, *Der Meister des Marienlebens und Sein Kries* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1978), 174-176, fig. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Dante, *Purgatory*, trans. Robert M. Durling, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), X, 31-33.

<sup>4</sup> Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. and ed. Wayne A. Rebhorn (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2016), 5: 184.

integral part of nature, arising “[. . .] from roots within nature herself.”<sup>5</sup> The interchangeability between painting and nature is suggested by his notion that nature could generate figures like the painter, “for we observe she often fashions in marble hippocentaurs and bearded faces of kings.”<sup>6</sup> Pliny the Elder was a model for all three writers, and possibly for Cusa. While Pliny’s descriptions of the ancient Greek artist Zeuxis’s artifice celebrated paintings that produced the illusion of reality, he, like Cusa, also found a correlation between artistic process and the workings of the cosmos, which is reflected in his very inclusion of chapters on the visual arts in the *Natural History*. As Verity Platt has shown, artisans in the age of Pliny were understood to make natural materials perform as part of a generative force that affected the entire cosmos.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the *Natural History* begins with the observation that the Greek word for world means “ornament,” and that the sky is named *caelum* after metal-chasing, *caelatum*.<sup>8</sup> For Pliny and for Alberti, art could operate as nature, just as nature could produce art.

Early modern writings emphasise the renaissance painter as an excellent imitator of nature, vying with artists of the classical past in their aptitude for mimesis.<sup>9</sup> The artist’s creative powers as paralleling those of nature is now an axiom of art history. However, the opinions of theologians on the subject have been neglected in favour of a humanist viewpoint. This chapter will consider theories of artistic creation from a theological perspective, placing them in relation to Crivelli’s practice. In doing so, I want to suggest that a broader notion of naturalism existed in the time of Crivelli, and that there were ways other than mimesis in which artists could engage with the natural world. As I argued in Chapters Four and Five, Crivelli’s paintings throw a veil of artifice over the objects and beings he represents. They are not naturalistic in the art-historical sense of the word, since they do not imitate nature in appearance. But by making his artistic process explicit, his paintings claim to possess an order that parallels the workings of nature. As well as assembling a panoply of objects and beings of both human and natural product, Crivelli worked with nature’s raw materials to transform inert matter into figuration. Within his microcosms, each vegetable, mineral, stone and being interact as part of the overall functioning of the art object, just as each facet of the cosmos possesses its own unique role.

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<sup>5</sup> Alberti, “Dedication of the Italian Text to Filippo Brunelleschi,” in *On Painting*, 35.

<sup>6</sup> Alberti, *On Painting*, 63.

<sup>7</sup> Platt, “Of Sponges and Stones,” 246-58.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 247-8; Pliny, *Natural History*, 2.8.

<sup>9</sup> For a summary of the tropes in Italian writings of the fifteenth century on this theme, see Martin Kemp, “From ‘mimesis’ to ‘fantasia’: The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genius in the Visual Arts,” *Viator* 8 (1977): 347-98.

Working with Cusa's notion of artistic unity, in this final chapter I explore Crivelli's paintings as hybrid objects, which encompass the forms, materials and effects of numerous different artistic media, as well as those of nature herself. Just the art of the goldsmith is strengthened by its technical scope, I argue that Crivelli's paintings are spiritually-effective objects by virtue of their hybridity, which summon the viewer to contemplate different physical realms. Moreover, as assemblages of media and matter, they are artisanal parallels to the infinite variety of God's created nature. I begin by exploring Crivelli's altarpieces as ideal *Gesamtkunstwerken* – total works of art – in which the objects he depicts are not limited by their material conditions and take on new characteristics within the pictorial realm. *St Michael* from the smaller polytych for San Domenico, Ascoli, exemplifies how living and non-living forms interact within this realm. Drawing upon the concept of art as an imitation of nature in its raw materials and operations rather than in its appearance, I will then show how Crivelli conceived of painting as a human-made, artisanal parallel to God's created nature.

### The altarpiece as *Gesamtkunstwerk*

Crivelli's paintings unite the materials, techniques and aesthetic of numerous different arts.<sup>10</sup> This is particularly the case in his polyptychs. Metal, the material of goldsmiths' art, is abundant, and worked with the same iron tools used in goldsmithing to decorate the gold-leaf grounds (**fig. 117**).<sup>11</sup> Actual gems embedded in crowns, morses and necklaces connect Crivelli's renditions with real pieces of goldsmiths' art (**fig. 141**), while gilt relief in *pastiglia* shares a physical dimension with the metalwork objects it imitates (**fig. 30**).<sup>12</sup> Architecture is represented in painted microarchitecture such as thrones, or miniature buildings held by saints (**fig. 68**), as well as physically in the frame, which was an analogy for the church architecture that housed the altarpiece (**fig. 14**). Fictive ceramics contain flowers before the Virgin (**fig. 67**), and oriental rugs flutter from windows (**fig. 2**). The visual and physical effects of marble, stone and wood are captured in egg tempera by alluding to their hard surfaces and their condition when fractured or carved (**fig. 1**). Crivelli's standing figures ask to be treated as polychromed sculptures adorned with real accessories, standing on the edge of their parapets and projecting forward from their gold supports (**fig. 46**). Swathes of heavy,

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<sup>10</sup> See Ch. One.

<sup>11</sup> Skaug, *Punch Marks from Giotto to Fra Angelico*, 1:61.

<sup>12</sup> Montevicchi, "La produzione orafa," 110-13.

embroidered fabrics are presented both pictorially and texturally with tooled and raised gold (**figs. 75, 119**). The natural world is incorporated in the plants, animals and minerals Crivelli paints – a panoply of different species of flowers, fruits and vegetables, birds and insects, and various natural materials (**fig. 11**). Nature, as we will see below, is also physically present in the materials out of which Crivelli's paintings are made.<sup>13</sup>

Crivelli's altarpieces not only represent the surfaces, colours and textures of artisanal and organic matter; they even appropriate aspects of their function. We saw in Chapter One that his analogies to the materials, techniques and designs of goldsmith's work, for which Ascoli Piceno was famed, utilise the currency of a local artistic idiom, and therefore ask his viewers to behold his paintings as prestigious objects. His gold-thread bird designs in paintings made for the town of Ascoli Piceno draw on the power of the oriental cloths that wrapped the sacred relics of Saint Emidius (**figs. 40, 41**). The painted orphrey worn by Crivelli's depiction of Ascoli's patron saint not only has a visual relationship with the embroidered orphrey worn by Bishop Caffarelli (**fig. 42**), thereby associating him with Emidius, but it also insists on painting's ability to surpass its textile counterpart, both in form and function (**fig. 46**).

The term *Gesamtkunstwerk* was coined by the composer Richard Wagner in 1849 to describe the harmonious unity of dance, music, poetry, painting, sculpture and design in opera.<sup>14</sup> Like Nicholas de Cusa's notion of the "Oneness" of the divine art, Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* is an authentic, compelling whole, formed of numerous separate parts which are enhanced when unified. An empowered union of arts is at play in Crivelli's work. When painting, goldsmith's art, sculpture, architecture and textiles come together, they form artisanal microcosms for the Virgin, Christ and saints. In Crivelli's paintings artistic media are not limited by their particular physical conditions, but become ideal versions of themselves, according to the conditions of Crivelli's painted worlds. In the Brera *Coronation of the Virgin*, for example, the throne that supports Christ and the Virgin is impossibly opulent and ornate (**fig. 119**). Finding a patron with a budget to fund the large slabs of marble and solid gold out of which it is made would be challenging, but perhaps not as challenging as finding carvers skilled enough to manipulate hard stone into bizarre, organic forms with an improbable pliancy. In painting, there are no limits as to how matter can be crafted; the only limit is in the artist's mind.

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<sup>13</sup> For a summary of Crivelli's materials and techniques, see Casavecchia, "La tecnica di Carlo Crivelli," 12-20.

<sup>14</sup> Wagner, "The Art-Work of the Future," in *The Art-Work of the Future and Other Works*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 69-213.

The difference between the concept of an artefact and the practical, material realisation of it was addressed by several fifteenth-century theorists, including Filarete, who wrote in his *Trattato di Architettura*, “no matter how good sculpture is, it will always appear to be the material that it is. In painting, however, it seems to be the thing itself, and many are fooled into thinking the object is real.”<sup>15</sup> For Filarete, painting was not limited in the same way as other art forms, since it was an imitative medium that could achieve a higher level of illusion. However, as I argued in Chapter Five, Crivelli employed the conditions of his medium as a device, separating him from other painters of his time. Crivelli’s works do indeed release objects from their material conditions, but only to inflict a new set of pictorial conditions upon them, so that they behave according to his rules. Nicholas of Cusa was also interested in the distance between a concept and its material realisation, writing

Because of the material in which it is received, [the form of the artefact] is to a greater or lesser extent like the conception of it; but it is never exactly equal to the conception. By comparison, the forms of things are in the image of the Divine Art.<sup>16</sup>

Filarete’s idea of painting is comparable to Cusa’s Divine Art, which could fashion artefacts according to their conceptual prototypes without physical constraints. The objects represented in Crivelli’s work are also fashioned according to their conceptual, or even platonic, prototypes, but rather than being realised under the conditions of nature, they are realised under the pictorial conditions of the altarpiece, and rather than the artificer being God, he is Crivelli. As *Gesamtkunstwerken*, Crivelli’s paintings possess a generative capacity that runs parallel to the workings of nature herself.

## Artisanal ecosystems

Stephen Campbell has observed that Crivelli poses “a *paragone* of human craftsmanship and the natural order” in the *Annunciation* (1486; **fig. 2**).<sup>17</sup> He writes,

In the upper right zone of the painting there is an array of coloured planar surfaces set forth for our comparison: a precious Anatolian carpet, the variegated tail of a peacock, carved reliefs of *spiritelli* and foliate ornament, revetment of coloured marble, a ceiling with red and blue coffers receding in perspective. All of these stand in analogous relation to the painting itself, with the implication that painting surpasses each of them in its spectacular re-rendering of their effects.

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<sup>15</sup> Filarete, *Treatise on Architecture*, book 23, f. 181 r., 309.

<sup>16</sup> De Cusa, “Sermon XXII: Dies Sanctificatus,” 366.

<sup>17</sup> Campbell, “On the Importance of Crivelli,” 26.

It is interesting to note that paintings set in an unnaturalistic, celestial realm present the *paragone* in a different way. While in a single-field altarpiece like the *Annunciation*, disparate elements coexist and behave ostensibly as they would in reality, in works where the figures are backed with gold leaf in an ornamental vacuum devoid of spatial depth, material and concept operate as one. As an older typology of altarpiece than the *pala quadra*, the polyptych for Crivelli represents a space in which to utilise a range of techniques that draw attention to the picture support and transform painting into a precious object, such as a metalwork antependium (**fig. 35**); tooling and relief ornaments never find their way into Crivelli's single-field altarpieces.<sup>18</sup> Just as painting is presented metaphorically as a work of sculpture or goldsmiths' art, as we saw in Chapters One and Four, the operations of nature and her raw materials are also reconstructed in Crivelli's multi-panelled altarpieces, rather than just represented in mirror form.

Crivelli's *Saint Michael* from the smaller altarpiece for San Domenico, Ascoli (c.1479/80), proposes an equivalence between his art and nature, between painting and other artistic media (**figs. 36, 120**). Michael wears attire variously fashioned from feathers, metal, silk and gems. He is shown against a backdrop of marble and gold, standing upon the leathery body of the devil, a hybrid creature between reptile, bird and mammal with wings, claws, fur, and scales. Michael's skirt, with its layers of gold, green, and pink fringes, closely resembles the feathers of his wings, which are presented as organic equivalents with the same colour sequence but without gold leaf. Similarly, the symmetrical gold scales of Michael's breastplate and his leg shields contrast with the smaller and more haphazard green scales of the devil's skin, while the red veins that spread through the devil's wings compare to the softer red veins of the variegated marble surface upon which they lay. The devil's head is seen in front of the frieze, which reproduces his horns and head in sculpted figuration. The shape of a rosette replicates between the red marble frieze seen between Michael's legs, the *pastiglia* motif on his breastplate, and in the tooled gold ground behind.

Crivelli's *St Michael* panel appears to host spontaneous figurations that replicate across animal and mineral, and objects of natural and human facture. Just as Crivelli is capable of artifice, revealing the workings of his craft, so too can nature engage in this generative game, producing patterns in marble, feathers and skin that rhyme with the finely-wrought surfaces of crafted objects, reminding us of Alberti's words that nature "often

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<sup>18</sup> The only exception is the lunette depicting the *Pietà* now in the Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome, in which halos are raised with *pastiglia* (**fig. 165**).

fashions in marble hippocentaur and bearded faces of kings.” However, generation is not limited to the parity between art and nature: the ground of Crivelli’s painting is so fertile that even inanimate objects produce figurations. Michael’s breastplate bears the face of an animated child, while his leg shields morph into lion’s heads whose eyes look at the viewer. In other words, there is a merging between the natural and the man-made, and Crivelli’s imitations of both, which reinforces the notion of the painting having generative forces of its own.

Platt has shown that ornament in Roman painting in the time of Pliny could reveal “continuities with and between the physis of natural mimesis and human practices of imitation and adornment.”<sup>19</sup> Platt has identified a slippage between “figure and abstraction, the simulation and the ‘real’, and between images and their material vehicles” in the frescoes and architecture of the House of the Gilded Cupids at Pompei (AD 70s).<sup>20</sup> For example, a lararium (shrine) to the household’s gods features frescoes with fictive marble that reveal a human face in the veining, which claims to be a natural marvel but is in fact, as Platt puts it, “marvellously contrived illusion” (**fig. 181**).<sup>21</sup> Just above is actual cipollino marble in the lararium’s carved colonettes, which the viewer is invited compare with the fictive marble below. “Pictorial figuration,” writes Platt, “is just one option within a range of emergent processes by which one substance might be transformed into another, shaped by the generative *ratio* that infuses the world-order.”<sup>22</sup>

Closer to Crivelli is the work of Andrea Mantegna, in which the enlivening of stony matter through his pictorial work is continuously evoked, as well as the kinship between his art and nature’s processes. The form that Mantegna’s self-portrait takes in the Camera Picta (1465-74, Ducal Palace, Mantua) - a face emerging from swirls of foliage in a fictive stone pilaster – proposes a relationship between natural germination and his own creative process, as Jérémie Koering has shown.<sup>23</sup>

The play on figure and abstraction, representation and material support, seen in the lararium and elements of Mantegna’s work is also found in Crivelli’s paintings, particularly his multi-panelled altarpieces. In Saint Michael’s breastplate, for example, there is a blend of organic and human-made, flat fiction and real relief (**fig. 36**). These realms are emphasised with shadow. Scrolls of foliage are rendered graphically in black and shaded with parallel

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<sup>19</sup> Platt, “Of Sponges and Stones,” 247.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 263-4.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 262-3.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>23</sup> Koering, “Changing Forms: Mantegna’s Poietics in the Camera Picta,” in Campbell and Koering, *Andrea Mantegna*, 95-112.

hatching in a way that resembles a *niello* or an engraving, so that eye reads the designs as on top of a flat surface.<sup>24</sup> Yet the shading is more pronounced on the saint's left side, apparently furthest away from the viewer, making the armour appear to cover a three-dimensional body. This is also true of the *pastiglia* relief, which, although manifestly attached to the flat surface of the panel, is shaded on Michael's side that appears furthest away from the viewer. The interplay between the motifs in *pastiglia* and the hatched forms creates relief and flatness simultaneously, and a sense of transitioning from an artisanal, fictive realm to a natural, real one. Saint Michael's fringed sleeves cast a shadow onto the gold breastplate, while *pastiglia* is reinforced with a glazed shadow, as well as casting its own, real shadows; the foliate, graphic forms are hatched to suggest shadow but this is explicitly a fictive shadow, contained as it is by the flat decoration of the breast plate. Crivelli thus merges and distorts almost imperceptibly the naturalistic, the real, the fictive and the crafted, making the viewer's perception ambivalent.

Transitions between flatness and relief, natural and man-made, painting and other media are expressed by an endless network of *paragone* threaded throughout *Saint Michael*, producing a sense of art's emergent processes that contribute to the functioning of the whole. The picture support is an optimal environment to host these artisanal transformations, which emulate the growth and change that take place in nature. Like an ecosystem, Crivelli's image is a community of living and non-living, which interact to produce an energy flow. The principle that earth is a self-regulating system with emergent properties — the result of a series of interactions between organic and inorganic that sustain life — was conceptualised in antiquity and the middle ages by thinkers such as Pliny the Elder and Nicholas of Cusa. Cusa theorised that "in each thing Oneness is found by way of the unified whole."<sup>25</sup> As an example, he cited "a man's hand or foot in relation to the man - even as also regards each part of the universe in relation to the universe."<sup>26</sup> The sense that each component of Crivelli's image bears a comparative relation to the workings of the whole is suggested by the way in which his ornaments intermingle and replicate across different materials. As such, the notion of the *Gesamkunstwerk* is expanded in Crivelli's art: not only are multiple arts encompassed, but also multiple realms — the living figures, the non-living artistic media, such as fictive relief, and the real forms in relief that exist in the viewer's space. Unified, they assist Crivelli's panel to perform its devotional function.

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<sup>24</sup> On similarities between these designs and Martin Schongauer's engravings, see Ch. One, 45-6.

<sup>25</sup> Cusa, "Sermon XXII: Dies Sanctificatus," 366.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

For example, there appear to be forces at play that assist Saint Michael to triumph over the devil. Naked and unclothed of ornamental matter, the two tiny humans whose souls are being weighed in the scales await their fate, which is contingent upon the will of the image. Saint Michael, encased in Crivelli's crafted matter, tramples upon the devil, of organic (albeit, evil) matter. The artisanal force, unleashed by Crivelli's skills upon the panel, conquers the malevolent force of the devil, whose pose echoes Michael's. As Satan grabs onto the Saint's leg, Michael clutches the instrument with which he will kill Satan, and as the devil's other hand gropes for the scales containing the humans, the Saint delicately holds them between his thumb and index finger. All of the anthropomorphised forms of the image are directed towards the devil over whom they triumph: the child's *pastiglia* face in the breastplate and the lion's faces in the knee shields look upon the helpless monster below. The figure of Saint Michael, whose physical and spiritual armour are personified by Crivelli's ornament, becomes an analogy for the panel painting itself as an efficacious object that helped to spread an anti-heretical message in its Dominican setting, visible to the congregation on its altar in the first right-hand chapel of the church of San Domenico.<sup>27</sup> Unlike the naked devil and the human figures in the scale, the body of the saint is encased in the product of Crivelli's craft; the small *pastiglia* buckles that join his leg shields exist in physical space and invite the viewer to reflect on the fact that the figure is adorned in an artisanal skin of Crivelli's making. Just as Saint Michael's ornamental armour functions as a protective encasement, assisting him to defeat evil, so too does Crivelli's embellishment of the entire surface of the panel with a richly crafted, artisanal skin enable the object to perform its devotional and didactic function. Alberti's claim that "painting possesses a truly divine power," seems to encapsulate the generative forces at play in Crivelli's *Saint Michael* panel.<sup>28</sup> The irony, of course, is that Alberti's ideal painting in no way resembles Crivelli's amalgam of media and anti-naturalistic forms, which transition via painting from one media, dimension, and realm into others.

Although it is easy to isolate *Saint Michael*, now that the panels from the smaller altarpiece for San Domenico in the National Gallery are displayed in separate frames, and the central panel is in Budapest (for a reconstruction, see **fig. 25**), it is clear that the ornamental environment for each figure was conceived according to their unique role. This is most evident in the marble platforms and friezes that the saints stand upon, which vary in colour and decoration in each panel (**figs. 33, 120, 128, 129**). However, Crivelli used the same

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<sup>27</sup> On the mission of the Dominicans to prevent the spread of heresy in relation to Crivelli's work for the Order, see Ch. Two, 67, 82-3, 93.

<sup>28</sup> Alberti, *On Painting*, 60.

tooled pattern in the gold ground throughout, which joins the separate panels into a unified whole. Thus, each panel was conceived as a world within the world of the altarpiece, just as the polyptych was contained within the microcosm of the church, itself a symbol for the Heavenly Jerusalem. That is not to say that these different realms are not in conversation. The panels interact, as do the two altarpieces made for separate ends of the church of San Domenico in Ascoli – the larger for the high altar (1476; **fig. 24**), and the smaller for the first right-hand chapel.<sup>29</sup> While Michael of the smaller altarpiece takes on the pose of the Baptist in the larger altarpiece, Lucy finds her counterpart in Catherine as an aristocratic female martyr, Peter Martyr in Dominic as a Dominican, and Jerome in Aquinas as a Doctor of the Church.

The smaller altarpiece's ornamental scheme also complements that of the larger one. Relief is present in the form of *pastiglia* and gems; the gold grounds are tooled with same pattern, but it is smaller and thus more condensed. *Saint Michael* is host to rich medial transitions, but Crivelli makes similar *paragone* in the other panels of the smaller altarpiece, as well as those of the larger altarpiece. In the smaller altarpiece, the silver-leaf *pastiglia* pearls of Lucy's necklace morph into painted pearls in her headpiece, an effect that would have been even more striking before the silver leaf of the necklace tarnished, making it appear darker (**fig. 135**). The gilt candelabra pattern bordering the Virgin's *pastiglia* mantle is translated into a flat, fictive frieze on the piers of her throne (**fig. 75**). In *Saint Peter* of the larger altarpiece, the real cord that borders the orphrey of his cope is echoed in the tooled cord pattern that encircles the pomegranate design in the gold ground just behind him (**fig. 47**).<sup>30</sup> In the central panel, the stone frieze below the Virgin depicts a sculpted cherub's head, which looks up towards the sleeping head of the Christ child (**fig. 78**).<sup>31</sup> The *Virgin's* clothing is ornamented both with physical gems around her neckline, and painted gems along the border of her gown. There is rhyme between the three painted stones that balance upon Saint Stephen's head and shoulders, and the toggles in wooden relief, through which the tassels of his amice pass, gathered in threes on each side of his shoulder (**fig. 91**).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See Ch. Two, 70-3.

<sup>30</sup> As noted with Caroline Campbell in conversation, July 2017.

<sup>31</sup> For Jean Campbell, the exchange between the Christ Child and the sculpted cherub's head produces "a governing fiction about the relation of death and resurrection." See Campbell, "Grace in the Making," 46-7.

<sup>32</sup> Alison Wright has also highlighted the rhyme of Saint Stephen's stones and toggles. She points out another in the polyptych in Ascoli's Cathedral between "St. Emidius's halo overlaid on his pointed mitre when seen next to the similarly contoured pattern of his brocade ground with its crowing ogee." Wright describes such examples as a "pictorial game" in which "ornament-as-ground and ornament-as-attribute begin to resemble one another." Wright, "Crivelli's Divine Materials," 65.

Thomas Golsenne has suggested that Crivelli employs a “meta-artistic language,” which reproduces its own art through those objects which themselves bear images: the staff with a face held by Saint Anthony in the 1470 altarpiece for Porto San Giorgio (**fig. 182**); the brocades depicting birds (**fig. 57**); the animalisation of Michael’s armour (**fig. 120**).<sup>33</sup> But Crivelli’s paintings do more than just make inanimate objects bear faces: substances can transform into others, and patterns can carry across living and non-living things. The string of painted pearls around Lucy’s head can morph into *pastiglia* pearls around her neck, and the horns of the devil that Michael stands upon can imprint themselves in the stony matter below. By playing on the distinction between his own artifice and nature’s art, Crivelli presents his works as human-made equivalents to nature herself, just as the artist who made the lararium at Pompei made the viewer compare natural substances and spontaneous figurations with human-made counterparts.

Almost divine, Crivelli’s technical mastery over a whole range of materials, and their manifestations in different dimensions, is clear to the viewer. There is no ideological hierarchy between fictive and naturalistic; spatial and temporal boundaries are dissolved, which has the effect of both promoting artisanal matter and calling into question the veracity of the worldly dimension. This leaves the painted images of the sacred figures in an ambiguous position. As they notice *trompe-l’oeil* objects (**fig. 3**) and wear accessories in the third dimension (**fig. 1**), they seem to inhabit simultaneously all realms, and, thus, they break down the distinctions between them: although representative of human flesh of God’s making rather than carved stone of human making, they, like the fictive frieze of carved relief, are the product of Crivelli’s art. Flesh can appear comparatively hard and marble-like next to the pliant forms of sculpted matter, such as the hybrid creatures in friezes or those that double as arms to the Madonna’s thrones in several altarpieces, such as the central panel from the altarpiece for Porto San Giorgio, 1470 (**fig. 90**).<sup>34</sup> Sculpture is animated and paint is immobilised through Crivelli’s intervention.

The dissolving of boundaries is a powerful analogy for the mediating role played by the sacred figures. Aware of a dimension beyond the painting, they are attentive to the votive address of the Christian viewer. As they interact with ostensibly inanimate matter, which has morphed and enlivened in their presence, they are veritable interlocutors with the invisible God. As well as demonstrating sacred presence, the particular conditions cultivated by Crivelli’s work were appropriate for religious contemplation, an engaging process in which

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<sup>33</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 216.

<sup>34</sup> On the transformation of inert matter into live matter, and its relationship to the resurrection in Crivelli’s Boston *Pietà* (**fig. 38**), see Bagnoli, “Mary’s Measure,” 733-5.

the viewer was encouraged to probe at the relation between their own dimension and those represented by the painting. The physical transformations that saw inanimate matter become enlivened by paint and relief, and the transitions between different media described above, would have been conceptually familiar to the Christian viewer, in whose mouth the consecrated host became Christ's body.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, contemplating the replications between shapes and patterns as they morph across materials and surfaces would have aided the viewer's spiritual journey via the image. We saw in Chapter Two that Crivelli's polyptychs offered the Dominican viewer sites for meditation that enabled them to ponder the content of their studies, forming memories that would assist them to deliver their sermons.<sup>36</sup> I suggested that Crivelli's polyptychs may have been appealing to the Order of Preachers for this very reason, and in fact, we find similar transitions between organic and inorganic, art and life, in the triptych that Crivelli painted in 1482 for the Dominicans of Camerino.

The two lateral panels inhabited by Saints Peter and Dominic on the left (**fig. 37**) and Venantius and Peter Martyr on the right (**fig. 168**) have friezes articulated with animal and human skulls in various states of decay, a semi-flayed bovine head, a sculpted terracotta human head, and fruit, held together with strips of blue and pink cloth (for a detail, see **fig. 79**). Where we would expect to find purely fictive sculptural ornament, we find instead natural objects arranged as art alongside sculpted form. Lightbown noted that the frieze presents a message of *momento mori*,<sup>37</sup> while Golsenne observed that the way in which it represents natural objects in the place of sculpture shows "painting's superiority over sculpture in the degree to which it imitates reality." He added that "with this allusion to the *paragone*, Crivelli perhaps makes reference via the work's ornamentation to a self-reflection as an artist positioned at the head of the 'modern' movement in painting."<sup>38</sup> Neither point (although both correct) accounts for why both animal and human skulls, a bald head covered in flesh, and a sculpted terracotta head with luscious hair are presented for our inspection alongside various fruits. I would suggest that the friezes pose an allegory about different states of being and non-being, generated both naturally and artistically. Caroline Walker Bynum has shown that the fear of bodily decay was widespread in Christian premodernity

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<sup>35</sup> Martina Bagnoli makes a similar point in regard to Crivelli's Boston *Pietà* (**fig. 38**), arguing that the picture engages the viewer's sensory perceptions to apprehend the transubstantiation of Christ's body into the Eucharist. See Bagnoli, "Mary's Measure," 729-744.

<sup>36</sup> See 84-95.

<sup>37</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 285.

<sup>38</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 216. Author's translation.

and could signal “moral decadence and damnation.”<sup>39</sup> Holy matter, the bodies of saints in particular, was believed not only to resist putrefaction, but to be eternally alive. A frequent trope used by medieval theologians to express the triumph over decay was to compare relics to flowers and precious stones. For the Benedictine abbot Peter the Venerable (d. 1156), from the dryness of saint’s bones came “fresh flowers,” suggesting that “youth is made in old age;” and he recommended the faithful to “hoard them as pearls [. . .] preserve them as vessels of the resurrection.”<sup>40</sup> Not only are bones therefore incorruptible like stones, they are eternally fertile as well. Crivelli’s friezes in the Dominican triptych draw upon similar anxieties about death and decay, which are tempered by the analogy of matter as incorruptible and somehow alive. But they introduce another element into the allegory, which is Crivelli’s own role in making this possible. The animal and human skulls, like the flawless fruits beside them, are petrified eternally in paint, hardened like the marble behind them. At the centre of each frieze, a sculpted head holds the strips of cloth in place that support the skulls and fruits: the sculptures, brought forth artistically, are responsible for keeping the organic matter in balance.

We find more suggestive continuations across organic and inorganic matter in other regions of the panels for San Domenico in Camerino. The pear just above the semi-flayed bovine skull in Peter and Dominic’s panel sits upon ebbing veins of marble, echoing them in both its curves and pale colour (**fig. 37**). Across in Venantius and Peter Martyr’s panel, the pointed head of Venantius’s painted spear doubles up in the ground just behind, where the fine tip of a pomegranate form tooled in gold mirrors its exact shape (**fig. 183**). In the Virgin and Child’s panel the plums, flowers and a broad bean strewn across the ledge above Crivelli’s signature are in conversation with the stony matter beside them (**fig. 177**). The clusters of plums and their leaves echo the fruits and flowers of the hybrid plant-child sculpted in the frieze above; the white and pink carnations rhyme with petal-shaped green splotches of marble above; the split-open broad bean shell reflects the jagged crack in the stone cornice beside it (**fig. 184**). Patterns across different modes of figuration, natural and artificial, imply that the various components of Crivelli’s painting interact as a result of a generative energy that spreads throughout. These parts form a celestial, life-giving microcosm for the sacred beings represented by the image, which comes alive as the viewer notices its interactive system. Crivelli’s ornament gives his creations, and by extension, the holy beings represented, real presence.

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<sup>39</sup> Bynum, *Christian Materiality*, 186.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 181.

While these medial replications are few in Crivelli's earliest works and his later *pale quadre*, they are altogether absent in commissions of lesser importance. They become prominent in his polyptych for the cathedral in Ascoli Piceno (**fig. 14**) and reach their climax in the three relief polyptychs Crivelli painted for the Dominicans (**figs. 20, 24, 25**). This invites several conclusions. Firstly, it strengthens the arguments I advanced in Chapter One that in Ascoli, where metalwork and textiles were prized above painting, Crivelli began to investigate the dialogues between painting and other artistic media, posing a self-reflexive commentary on the functions of his art. Secondly, it would suggest that the Dominicans were particularly sensitive to Crivelli's self-reflexive language due to the methods of their devotional practice, a fact that Crivelli acknowledges by using relief to hint at different levels of reality in his work for the Order. Thirdly, it demonstrates that Crivelli's artistic identity, represented in its purest form in his most important paintings that are largely the product of his own hand, is bound up with the play on different forms of figuration that rival the infinite variety of nature.

### **The stuff of creation**

Anne Dunlop has shown that the materials used in panel paintings and their origins came with a range of thaumaturgical, cultural and Christian associations which contributed to the significance of the sacred image represented.<sup>41</sup> She notes that the geographies of materials – “Asian stones and African gold, silver and tin from Northern Europe and earths from local sources” – mirrored the distance of the otherworldly and yet humble figures of Mary and Christ.<sup>42</sup> Gold, gems and precious stones were mined in far-off places, and their otherworldly origins were also evoked in the Bible. In Genesis (2:11), we are told that the first of the four rivers flowing from Eden, Pishon, flows around the land of Havilah, “where gold groweth” and where Bdelium and the onyx stone are also found. The association between gems and the cosmos was also explored by Pliny, who wrote that in gems, “the majesty of nature is concentrated [. . .]. For many people a single gem is enough to provide them with a supreme and perfect contemplation of the universe.”<sup>43</sup> If they do not include real or imitation gems, Crivelli's paintings depict precious stones in almost every work. Very few extant panels exist without some inclusion of gold leaf, and if none is present, it is unusually a smaller panel as

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<sup>41</sup> Dunlop, “On the origins of European painting materials,” 68-96.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 73, 87.

<sup>43</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, 37.1.

part of a larger ensemble that includes abundant gold. We have already seen that Crivelli's ornament furnishes his panels with a world that contains the sacred figures, and we may also say that the natural materials out of which Crivelli's paintings are made – a combination of wood, fibres, animal glue, gypsum, gold, and pigments made of plant dyes, minerals, precious stones and local soils – are material microcosms of God's created nature.<sup>44</sup>

Both the materials out of which humans fashioned art, and their impulse to do so, were believed by medieval theologians to be generated by God. According to the Dominican Albertus Magnus (c.1200-80) in his *De lapidibus*, gold and precious stones were produced by the same generative power from which humans were conceived and which also gave them the impulse to create art: “[. . .] all things whatsoever, whether made by nature or by art, receive their impulse in the first place from the powers of heaven.”<sup>45</sup> Albertus's pupil, Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), depicted by Crivelli in the upper tier of the larger altarpiece for San Domenico (**fig. 68**), echoed Magnus when he wrote that art not only “operates upon the material which nature provides” - *ars enim operatur ex materia quam natura ministrat* - it also “imitates the operations of nature:” *ars imitatur naturam in sua operatione*.<sup>46</sup> There is the sense that theologically speaking, works of art were understood as natural in their material composition, while their forms were artificial reconstructions of what artists had seen in God's nature.

With close visual analysis of the Dominican polyptychs, I argued above that Crivelli constructed artisanal worlds whose operations run parallel to those of nature. Living and non-living forms interact as part of an artisanal ecosystem, producing a generative energy that assists the work to perform its devotional function. Erwin Panofsky observed a similar force guiding the practice of the Flemish painter Jan van Eyck (born before 1395-1441):

A picture by Jan van Eyck claims to be more than ‘just a painting.’ It claims to be both a real object - and a precious object at that — and a reconstruction rather than a mere representation of the visible world... [Van Eyck] builds his world out of pigments as nature builds hers out of primary matter. The paint that renders skin, or fur, or even the stubble on an imperfectly shaved face seems to assume the very character of what it depicts.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Dunlop has analysed Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Annunciation* (1344) in these terms. See Anne Dunlop, “Materials, Origins and the Nature of Early Italian Painting,” in *Crossing Cultures: Conflict, Migration, and Convergence: Proceedings of the 32<sup>nd</sup> International Congress of the History of Art*, ed. Jaynie Anderson (Melbourne: The Miegunyah Press, 2009), 476.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Dunlop, “On the origins of European painting materials,” 83.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 165; 172.

<sup>47</sup> Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, vol. 1 (1953; reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 180-2.

Crivelli's works also claim to be real, precious objects, which not only represent but reconstruct the visual and physical world. However, as distorted space and the medium of tempera are offered as anti-naturalistic alternatives to perspective and oil, so too are different solutions found for the building materials out of which his pictorial microcosms are constructed. While works such as van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Canon Joris Van der Paele*, 1436 (**fig. 185**) aim to mirror nature by using the imitative power of pigments in oil, Crivelli's paintings do not aim at imitation. They construct nature anew by combining existing artistic tropes and media, which are reimagined within a pictorial world that is parallel to, but different from, God's nature. Such distortions of reality solicit the imaginative involvement of the viewer, in a way that a painted continuation of reality could not. Crivelli's works are open-ended fictions that are waiting to be completed by the viewer's interpretations. They are not visions of the natural world, but encourage visions in the imagination of the beholder. The sense that religious pictures played a central role in stimulating the beholder's imagination during devotion is evoked in a famous passage by the Franciscan Ugo Panziera in his *Trattato della Perfezione* (c.1320). Panziera compared the layers of a panel painting, from underdrawing, painting, and finally, to relief — which several scholars have convincingly suggested refers to *pastiglia* — with the devotee's spiritual journey from material to immaterial.<sup>48</sup> It is clear from Panziera's analogy that the manufactured nature of painting, not its complete assimilation with reality, is what was effective for stimulating internal visions.

Citing the theories of anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, Thomas Golsenne has shown that Crivelli composed via a process of "bricolage" — assembling motifs and styles he collected from the various centres in which he worked. Golsenne sees this as contrary to sixteenth-century notions of artistic genius, which framed the artist as a divinely-inspired creator.<sup>49</sup> Although Golsenne's notion is theoretically sound, Crivelli's process can in fact be elucidated by notions laid down by theologians including Aquinas, whose thinking was closer to how fifteenth-century audiences understood the artistic act. Umberto Eco has summarised Aquinas's notion of art as "the activity of combining things."<sup>50</sup> Aquinas believed that humans did not have the capacity to create, only to reconstruct what God had already created. For the thirteenth-century theologian, "*Phantasia*" was "a kind of storehouse of

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<sup>48</sup> Lars Jones, "Visio Divine? Donor Figures and Representations of Imagistic Devotion: The Copy of the 'Virgin of Bagnolo' in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence," in *Italian Panel Painting of the Duecento and Trecento*, 31-55; Lakey, "The Materiality of Light," 127.

<sup>49</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 212-16.

<sup>50</sup> Eco, *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, 172.

forms received by sense”: “*Quasi thesaurus quidam formarum per sensum acceptarum.*”<sup>51</sup>

The artist could then choose forms from this storehouse to make what he calls, “images of things, even of things not received from the senses.”<sup>52</sup> This is opposite to the ideas expressed by Leonardo who, shortly after 1500, wrote that the painter’s works are “more infinite than those made by nature.”<sup>53</sup> If the artist — in Leonardo’s conception — is endowed with infinite *fantasia*, Crivelli’s creativity resides in his ability to reconstruct nature anew, showing natural forms transfigured.

Crivelli’s skilled reconstructions using precious materials, materials which ultimately came from the earth that was created by God, produced a refined expression of manmade beauty that could evoke the divine. For the twelfth-century Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis, the beauty a gemstone-encrusted altar frontal transported him to “some strange region of the universe which neither exists entirely in the slime of the earth nor entirely in the purity of Heaven.”<sup>54</sup> Suger expressed a sentiment that was likely to have held true for Crivelli’s original viewers.<sup>55</sup> As gold and precious stones were believed to grow near the rivers that flowed directly from paradise, which was in turn believed well into the sixteenth century to be located somewhere on earth, paintings that incorporated them contained the promise of Redemption, since the New Jerusalem was a second Eden.<sup>56</sup> Crivelli’s patrons therefore possessed not only precious objects that honoured God and the saints represented in them, but material manifestations of divine presence on earth and the promise of a new heaven made of the stuff of paradise.<sup>57</sup>

However, Crivelli’s patrons were not the only ones who came one step closer to salvation through his art. The very act of painting was a redemptive activity, as outlined by Cennino in his introduction to the *Libro dell’Arte*, where he described it as one of the most noble labours that humans could pursue after the Fall.<sup>58</sup> As Pamela H. Smith has shown, the occupation of the artisan was regarded as a way of acquiring knowledge about the world that was lost after Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Paradise.<sup>59</sup> The products

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<sup>51</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 170.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Kemp, “From ‘mimesis’ to ‘fantasia,’” 377.

<sup>54</sup> Suger, *Abbot Suger*, 65.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>56</sup> Marjolijn Bol, “Gems in the Water of Paradise. The Iconography and Reception of Heavenly Stones in the Ghent Altarpiece” in Currie et al., *Van Eyck Studies*, 35-48.

<sup>57</sup> Revelation, Chapter 21:1, “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away...And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

<sup>58</sup> Cennini, *Il Libro dell’Arte*, 1:20.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 51.

of Crivelli's creative labour were his paintings, through which his refined skills sought to encapsulate and surpass all art forms. Unlike most of the other major painters of his time, Crivelli has left us no written testimony, and there survives no contemporary letter, inscription or biography by Crivelli or anyone else that reflects upon his artistic practice. An inscription on a predella panel now in the Louvre by an artist with whom Crivelli engaged in creative exchange throughout his career in the Marche, perhaps more than any other contemporary painter — Niccolò di Liberatore — is informative as to how he might have viewed his own position (**fig. 186**).<sup>60</sup> The inscription reads,

To the reader – the noble Donna Brigida, now dead, willed that this work be painted – a spectacle extremely pleasing to God. If you seek to know the author's name, it is Niccolò the disciple of Foligno – a beautiful crown of its territory. In 14[92] he added the last touch. But who is the more worthy of merit, I ask you, critical reader – since Brigida gave the commission, and he the executing hand?<sup>61</sup>

Niccolò's words emphasise the honorific function of his work, and by stating the date when the final touch was added to it, place its execution in a temporal reality that draws attention to the creative act. Most significant, however, is the primacy of the artist's hand over the patron's facilitating commission, which is implicit in the inscription. And it is the hand specifically — that is, the artist's manual effort, not the concept, design or materials — to which he draws the reader's attention. The altarpiece that the predella belongs to is still in the church for which it was made, San Niccolò in Foligno, housed there since 1492, according to the inscription. It demonstrates notable similarities to Crivelli's altarpieces, such as the marble surfaces upon which the saints stand and the crack in the earth of the central panel (**fig. 186**). It was ornamental devices such as these that Crivelli used to assert the primacy of his artifice, a primacy of which he reminded his viewers through his incessant signatures that would later acknowledge the knighthood he had earned for his art.<sup>62</sup> As in Crivelli's polyptychs, Niccolò's painted figures are suspended against a gold ground, distinguished from the narrative central panels of the *Nativity* and the *Resurrection*, which are set in convincing spatial settings with painted skies. The gold-backed figures have exaggerated gestures, and are thus presented as attentive interlocutors between the viewer and God. These features give a highly artificial quality to Niccolò's altarpiece, connecting his mature

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<sup>60</sup> On Crivelli and Liberatore, see Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli*, 41-2; Zeri, "Cinque Schede," 159; Filippo Todini, *Niccolò Alunno e la sua bottega* (Perugia: Quattroemme, 2004), 51-60, 67-8;

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Catherine King, *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy, c.1300-1550* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>62</sup> See App. One.

practice with Crivelli's. Just as Panziera encouraged his religious readers to imagine the fabricated layers of a panel painting as a way of envisaging God, Niccolò's and Crivelli's altarpieces highlight the manufactured nature of their work, through heightened artifice and inscriptions, marking them as human-made interfaces with the divine realm. As such, although their paintings were offerings to God facilitated by a patron, it was their own hand that ultimately enabled entry to paradise.

## Conclusion

In this final chapter, we have seen that Crivelli's paintings acquire efficacy by incorporating the forms and materials of numerous different artistic media, as well as nature herself. Under the conditions of Crivelli's pictorial microcosms these forms are released from their own material limitations and behave in ways that are possible only in painting. Crivelli reveals himself as a master of matter, capable of making non-living morph into living, and one material transform into another. His work demonstrates a fascination with different possibilities for figuration and the ways in which materials can behave in the pictorial realm. In the panel depicting *Saint Michael*, for instance, Crivelli's enlivening of matter produces a generative force that assists Michael to triumph over the devil, in turn reflecting the overall function of Crivelli's work to promote Christian messages and encourage piety. As a master of matter, Crivelli is responsible for bringing forth the presence of the sacred beings, whom he situates in a hybrid realm somewhere between earth and heaven. By appearing to dissolve the boundaries of real and unreal Crivelli's paintings underscore and play upon the status of saintly figures as beings in touch with multiple realms, acting as interlocutors between the viewer and God. The poetic interplay between objects, ornaments and beings that Crivelli weaves through his compositions stimulates the viewer's imagination, encouraging them to meditate upon the sacred subject. As I argued in Chapter Two, sustained contemplation formed an important part of the Dominicans' spiritual practice, which would have been aided by the kinds of poetic analogies in Crivelli's work I have been describing.

Although Crivelli's paintings clearly highlight his creative capacity, I have demonstrated that his practice aligns more closely to Dominican theories of artistic creation than it does to sixteenth-century notions of genius. For Aquinas, the artist was not endowed with generative capacities equal to God but possessed the ability to recombine His natural forms according to a divinely-guided "*Phantasia*." As I established in the earlier chapters of

this thesis, Crivelli observed the traditions of his predecessors (even if he often tested their limits). His creative impulses thrived within the boundaries of technique, subject matter and the physical shape of his altarpieces, which were more often than not chosen by the patron. Accordingly, my observations in this chapter show that Crivelli engaged with the medieval idea of art as a reconstruction of nature, using her raw materials. However, also here, he tested the limits of this framework. In Crivelli's art we can locate an alternative naturalism, one that is inspired by the patterns and processes of nature, but which reimagines them in a celestial fiction. The precious materials and facture of his paintings offered Crivelli's patrons a glimpse of paradise, as well as the opportunity for Crivelli to redeem himself through his craft as an artist. My study demonstrates that ornament in Crivelli is not superfluous or excessive but rather part of the structure of his images, assisting them to fulfil their devotional function. His renditions of the lustre and textures of precious surfaces, as well as his use of gems and gold, are not lavish but place his paintings in the context of a material cosmos of which humans and all living things are also part.

## ***Conclusion***

Tensions between object and illusion, material and skill, painting and other artistic media, nature and art, are a distinctive feature of Carlo Crivelli's art. His hybrid visual system resists traditional art-historical categorisation, which led to the demise of Crivelli's reputation in the twentieth century. Today, however, we recognise it as the most compelling aspect of his work and one that distinguishes it from his contemporaries. This thesis has shown that the dialectical tensions of Crivelli's paintings made them effective objects in the society in which he worked. By employing a methodology that draws upon both technical and historical evidence, this thesis has enabled a deeper understanding of how the physical characteristics of Crivelli's paintings informed the devotional practice of his original beholders. He employed an engaging pictorial idiom that worked to captivate and involve the viewer in various ways. He subverted representational norms, such as perspective, as a way of inviting the viewer's participation. He made ornament, figure and ground interact in a novel way, stimulating the beholder's imagination. Intense facial expressions, exaggerated gestures, a vivid colour palette, and often surprising ornaments, such as the cucumber, made Crivelli's paintings memorable, and visually alluring. Together with his irresistible technique, combining exquisitely worked gold, actual gems, elements in three-dimensional relief and impeccable painted surfaces, these features captivated the beholder and encouraged them to reflect productively upon the mysteries of the sacred subject.

This thesis fills a lacuna in the scholarship on Crivelli. While the recent rise of interest in his work, led by such scholars as Thomas Golsenne, Alison Wright, Stephen Campbell and Anna Degler, has revealed the intelligence of Crivelli's pictorial system, no previous study has drawn upon technical evidence, or offered a sustained analysis of particular works and their functions in their original settings. An understanding of Crivelli's techniques, and their historical context, is essential if we are to fully appreciate his pictorial idiom. My access to the National Gallery's collection, and the expertise of its scientists and conservators, has enriched this study with material evidence from the paintings themselves, offering a technical counterpart to their history and function. The research I carried out in Ascoli Piceno in the southern Marche, where the artist lived and worked for most of his life, has shed new light on how Crivelli responded to local artistic and religious customs through his work, and the ways in which his patrons engaged with his paintings. This holistic approach not only has offered a clearer picture of Crivelli's practice, and the reasons that led him to become the most celebrated painter in the Marche, it also opens up new realms of

possibility for future studies of Crivelli's work in the northern Marche, as well as the work of his contemporaries.

Crivelli has been characterised in the past as an artist who reproduced the style of his predecessors in the Veneto throughout his career,<sup>1</sup> or, at the other extreme, an artist who was so innovative, he relied upon his own imagination for creative stimulation.<sup>2</sup> However, this thesis has shown that Crivelli's paintings are intimately connected with place, emerging particularly in the rich dialogues he posed with local examples of goldsmiths' and textile art. My research demonstrates that Crivelli's use of gold can be understood in light of Ascoli's renowned goldsmithing tradition, while his small devotional Madonnas with mantles raised entirely in *pastiglia* (**fig. 1**) connect to Byzantine icons with metal revetments, such as the *Virgin Annunciate* in nearby Fermo (**fig. 158**). Although sumptuous textiles feature prominently in all of Crivelli's works, on occasion they are linked with the form and function of actual precious cloths (**figs. 40, 41**). While previous scholars have often highlighted Crivelli's fascination with the world of objects, I have established that the artist emulated local craft traditions, and specific objects, both as a communicative tool, and to make his paintings spiritually effective.

The mendicant patronage of Crivelli's richly embellished paintings presents an intriguing paradox. Although his relationship with the Franciscans has been explored on several occasions, the ways in which Crivelli's work responds to the Dominicans' requirements has been neglected.<sup>3</sup> My research shows that Crivelli's mixed-media, multi-panelled altarpieces for the Order of Preachers were not at odds with their ascetic principles, but assisted their spiritual practices in various ways (**figs. 20, 24, 25**). For instance, while their vivid aesthetic fulfils the requirements of suitable memory images, as recommended by Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, Crivelli's ornaments offered a starting point for their contemplations of the sacred subject, much as the marginalia of manuscripts highlight important content.

The technical study of Crivelli's altarpiece for San Domenico in Ascoli has provided a deeper understanding of Crivelli as a practitioner, revealing the rigour of his methods, the results of which were so appreciated by his audiences. My analysis demonstrates that the appearance of Crivelli's paintings must be considered in relation to how they have altered since the fifteenth century, and how he negotiated the practical circumstances of each commission, working with structures and subjects that were mostly chosen by his patrons,

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<sup>1</sup> Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, 144.

<sup>2</sup> Golsenne, *Carlo Crivelli*, 181.

<sup>3</sup> See Ch. One, n. 20.

and managing his workflow by involving the work of assistants. Although Crivelli followed the conventions of tempera painting that had been used by artists for centuries, it was his supreme skill and command of his materials that enabled him to push his medium to its limits, such that the precise aesthetic qualities of his paintings remain hard to describe.

In the second part of this thesis, I developed a theoretical framework with which to analyse Crivelli's pictorial system and its meanings, the first detailed account in the literature. One of its distinctive components is the interaction between paint and three-dimensional relief, and its play on the real and the unreal. Crivelli's manipulations of figure and ground, which extend to his use of shadow, work to complicate straightforward representation. I concluded that while the viewer's senses are stimulated by Crivelli's rich materials and his ornaments in relief, the play on different types of representation asks them to think critically about the illusion he has placed before them.

Even when relief is absent, Crivelli's paintings continue to play with surface and its beyond. His fascination with different kinds of boundary emerges, as I have shown, both in his use of tempera on panel, and in the finite contours that articulate form. My analysis demonstrates that Crivelli's art is intimately engaged in the interplay between seen and unseen, the boundary of vision and the limits of representation. I have concluded that the question of access is a central concern in Crivelli's work. By highlighting the painted surface as a boundary, rather than a window onto a scene, Crivelli gestures towards its function as an interface between the viewer and the sacred. Of course, all paintings of sacred subject were understood, to some degree, as interfaces with the 'beyond.' But Crivelli's are distinctive for depicting a world that is explicitly removed from the viewer's, built, as it is, of different optical and physical laws, making objects, materials and beings behave in surprising ways. Saints are located in hybrid environments, somewhere between earth and heaven, thereby connecting the two spheres, as is appropriate to their role as intercessors.

My study has shown that the multiple visual and semantic layers of Crivelli's images play on the idea of painting as a threshold, which may, or may not, be crossed. Visual impenetrability is, as I have shown, a metaphor for the inaccessibility of the sacred, just as the illegible pseudoscript displayed in the open books held by Crivelli's saints reminds the viewer of their inability to truly know God (**fig. 85**). The multiple cracks and openings in Crivelli's paintings hint at the image's permeability (**fig. 1**), yet relief ornaments, inverse perspective, and reflective gold surfaces, create an impasse between the devotee's spiritual journey and the sacred beyond. While every beholder (original and current) is beguiled by the impact of Crivelli's representational system, not all of them can access the deeper layers

of his images. In some instances, the meaning of certain ornaments, like Crivelli's cucumbers, or his bird designs, were understood by a select few (**fig. 57**). In others, one can only make out certain details, such as the partially obscured figure on Saint Dominic's orphrey that disappears from view, by being physically very close to the painting, which would have been impossible for most of Crivelli's original beholders (**fig. 169**). Often, the viewer must focus with sustained engagement upon Crivelli's images to notice features such the poetic connections between objects, ornaments and surfaces, whose forms replicate across different media and matter (**figs. 183, 184**). This thesis is the first study to explore this interplay in detail, and to suggest an interpretive framework that situates Crivelli's practice in relation to medieval theories of artistic creation.

The findings outlined in the first and second parts of this thesis complement one another. Together, they demonstrate that although Crivelli's paintings draw upon the materials, forms and functions of other artistic media, his visual system encourages the viewer to reflect upon matters that figurative sculpture in the round, textiles and goldsmiths' art cannot. In a region where luxury artistic media were highly valued, rich materials were consummate with honour. However, Crivelli's work makes the case that painting can be visually sumptuous (and, in cases where abundant gold and real gems were used, materially valuable), as well as trigger areas of the imagination that luxury artistic media preclude. His metapictorial experiments were perhaps only able to flourish in the way that they did in the Marche, where the role of easel painting was arguably not yet established in society in the same way as the so-called 'decorative' arts. However, my research suggests that Crivelli's patrons, and the mendicants especially, recognised that painting could do things that even the most materially rich objects could not. A visual object that probed at its own being may have assisted them in their introspective devotional practice, perhaps more so than one that reproduced natural optical laws. No longer was painting merely an imitative medium, a cheaper alternative to tapestry and metalwork antependia. Whilst encompassing all artistic media, Crivelli's art transcends each of them in its capacity to simulate a paradoxical reality of exquisite facture.

As an artist, Crivelli is elusive. We know almost no personal details about his life. However, this study has provided a more concrete sense of his authorial power, and the ways in which he communicated with his audiences. By the end of his life, Crivelli's exceptional skills were recognised in his knighthood and appellation as *domino*, lord, by his patrons in Fabriano in the contract for *The Coronation of the Virgin*.<sup>4</sup> Tellingly, however, later in the

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<sup>4</sup> Coltrinari, "Regesto," 197, doc. 133.

same contract, it was presumably Crivelli who had to correct the word *magister*, master, a lowlier form of address, back to *dominus*.<sup>5</sup> While there was no doubt in his mind that his art made him worthy of high social and intellectual standing, it appears that those around him still needed to be reminded that a painter could be due such an accolade. It is quite possible that not all of Crivelli's original viewers appreciated his unusually reflective statements about the relationship between reality and fiction, just as they were lost on most art historians until quite recently. Those who engaged with his art deeply, however, accepted his invitation to enter a liminal space, somewhere between earth and heaven, where belief in a beyond seemed possible.

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<sup>5</sup> Francesca Coltrinari, "Vittore e Carlo Crivelli: due vite parallele," in Coltrinari and Delpriore, *Vittore Crivelli*, 53.

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**Beyond Painting:  
Carlo Crivelli's Celestial Fictions**

**Volume Two  
Figures and Appendices**

Amanda Hilliam

The National Gallery, London  
Oxford Brookes University  
School of History, Philosophy and Culture  
Department of History of Art

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48. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Peter* (detail of fig. 47 showing cord lining the cope, string holding the keys together, the tilting morse and rings made of *pastiglia*).
49. Carlo Crivelli, *Saints Silvester and Francis*, 1468, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, each panel 105 x 44 cm, Church of SS. Lorenzo, Silvestro e Ruffino, Massa Fermana. Part of the altarpiece in the Church of SS. Lorenzo, Silvestro e Ruffino, Massa Fermana, fig. 7.
50. Bartolomeo Vivarini, *Saints Dominic, Augustine and Lawrence (Triptych of San Zanipolo)*, 1473, tempera on panel, 191 x 180 cm, Basilica dei Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.
51. Antonio Vivarini, *Saint Louis of Toulouse*, c.1450, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 46 x 36 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.
52. Giovanni Bellini, *San Giobbe altarpiece*, 1485, oil on panel, 471 x 258 cm, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.
53. Giovanni Bellini, *San Giobbe altarpiece* (detail of fig. 52 with orphrey).
54. Syrian or Byzantine, *Samite with Hunting Scenes in Medallions* (detail of fig. 40 showing a medallion).
55. Coptic, *Plant Scroll Enclosing Birds and Grapes*, 5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century, limestone, 22 x 52.7 x 6 cm, Brooklyn Museum, New York.
56. Coptic, *Bird Mosaic*, 4 x 6 m, 6<sup>th</sup> century, Jerusalem, near Damascus Gate.
57. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child* (detail of fig. 14 with the Virgin's red cloth-of-honour and bird design).
58. Carlo Crivelli, *Mary Magdalene* (detail of sleeve), c. 1470-3, tempera and gold on panel, 174 x 54 cm, Polo Museale di San Francesco, Montefiore dell'Aso. Part of the altarpiece for the Church of San Francesco, Montefiore dell'Aso.
59. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Emidius*; Syrian, *Samite with Hunting Scenes in Medallions*, detail of figs. 40 and 46 comparing grapes and leaves.
60. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Catherine*, (detail of fig. 32 with bird design).
61. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child* (detail of fig. 75 with bird design and pomegranates).
62. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Emidius*, c. 1470s, tempera on panel, 70 x 33 cm, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

63. Carlo Crivelli, *The Annunciation with Saint Emidius*, (detail of fig. 2 with Virgin's house).
64. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Francis Collecting the Blood of Christ the Redeemer*, c. 1489, tempera and gold on panel, 19 x 13, Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan.
65. Carlo Crivelli, *Thomas Aquinas* (detail of fig. 68 with figures emerging from church).
66. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Louis of Toulouse* (detail of ring), c.1470-3, tempera and gold on panel, 74 x 54 cm, Polo Museale di San Francesco, Montefiore dell'Aso. Part of the altarpiece for the Church of San Francesco, Montefiore dell'Aso.
67. Carlo Crivelli, *The Immaculate Conception*, 1492, tempera and gold on panel, 189 x 90 cm, The National Gallery, London. From the Church of San Francesco, Pergola.
68. Carlo Crivelli, *Thomas Aquinas*, 1476, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 60.5 x 39.5 cm, The National Gallery, London. Part of the larger altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno, reconstructed in fig. 24.
69. Emidio Ferretti, *Mappa topografica di Ascoli Piceno*, 1646, engraving, archivio fotografico di Ascoli Piceno. Circled below, the Church of San Pietro Martire; circled above, the Church of San Domenico.
70. French School, *An Angel bearing the Holy Thorn Relic* (detail of the *Holy Thorn Reliquary*), 14<sup>th</sup> century, gilt silver, Church of San Pietro Martire, Ascoli Piceno.
71. Anon, *Progetto di ridazione della Chiesa di S. Domenico ad aule scolastiche*, c. 1885, pen on paper, archivio fotografico di Ascoli Piceno.
72. Carlo Crivelli, *The Pietà*, 1476, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 71.8 x 64.5 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Part of the larger altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno, reconstructed in fig. 24.
73. Antonio and Bartolomeo Vivarini, *Osimo Altarpiece*, c. 1464, tempera and gold on panel, 208 x 244, Museo Civico, Osimo.
74. Pietro Alemanno, *The Virgin and Child with two Angels*, 1488, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 104.8 x 51.1 cm, private collection. Part of an altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno.
75. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child*, c.1479/80, tempera, gold, *pastiglia* and gems, 106.5 x 56 cm, The Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Part of the smaller altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno, reconstructed in fig. 25.
76. Marchigian, *Initial S with an Angel giving the Crown of Thorns to Christ* (detail of antiphonal), tempera and gold on vellum, Biblioteca Comunale Giulio Gabrielli, f. 59v.
77. Carlo Crivelli, *The Pietà* (detail showing the Crown of Thorns in gilt *pastiglia*), 1470, tempera, gold and *pastiglia*, 45 x 117 cm, Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit. Part of the altarpiece from the Church of San Giorgio, Porto San Giorgio, near Fermo.

78. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child*, 1476, tempera, gold, *pastiglia* and gems on panel, 148 x 63 cm, The National Gallery, London. Part of the larger altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno, reconstructed in fig. 24.

79. Carlo Crivelli, *Saints Peter and Dominic; Saints Peter Martyr and Venantius* (detail of figs. 37, 168 showing friezes).

80. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Dominic*, 1476, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 138 x 40 cm, The National Gallery, London. Part of the larger altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno, reconstructed in fig. 24.

81. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Francis*, 1476, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 61 x 40 cm, The National Gallery, London. Part of the larger altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno, reconstructed in fig. 24.

82. Carlo Crivelli, *John the Baptist*, 1476, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 138 x 40 cm, The National Gallery, London. Part of the larger altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno, reconstructed in fig. 24.

83. Fra Angelico, *Crucifixion with Saint Dominic*, fresco, 155 x 80 cm, Cell 17, The Convent of San Marco, Florence.

84. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Andrew*, 1476, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 61 x 40 cm, The National Gallery, London. Part of the larger altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno, reconstructed in fig. 24.

85. Carlo Crivelli, *Thomas Aquinas* (detail of fig. 68 with book).

86. Vittore Crivelli, *San Giacomo della Marca*, tempera grassa and gold on canvas, 225 x 80 cm, Galleria Nazionale delle Marche, Urbino.

87. Marchigian school, *Initial M with The Miracle at Fanjeaux* (detail of antiphonal), tempera and gold on vellum, Biblioteca Comunale Giulio Gabrielli, f. 6r.

88. Attributed to Bartolomeo d'Antonio Varnucci, *Initial E with Trellis, Putti and a Butterfly* (detail of a manuscript of *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, anon), 1440s, tempera and gold on paper, Biblioteca Comunale Giulio Gabrielli, MS. 198, f.1r.

89. Simone De Magistris, *Madonna of the Rosary*, 1592, oil on canvas, 331 x 185 cm, Pinacoteca di Ascoli Piceno.

90. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child with a Donor*, 1470, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 129.5 x 54.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Part of the altarpiece from the Church of San Giorgio, Porto San Giorgio, near Fermo.

91. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Stephen*, 1476, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 61 x 40 cm, The National Gallery, London. Part of the larger altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno, reconstructed in fig. 24.

92. Carlo Crivelli, *The Coronation of the Virgin, and the Pietà, with predella panels*, tempera and gold on panel, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan; predella, Keresztény Múzeum, Esztergon,

Museo di Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome and Musée Jacquemart-André. Reconstruction Golsenne, Carlo Crivelli, 38.

93. Niccolò di Liberatore called Alunno, *Crucifixion Polyptych*, 1480, tempera and gold on panel, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome; predella, Musée du Petit Palais, Avignon. From the Church of San Venanzio, Camerino. Reconstruction Daffra, "Carlo Crivelli a Camerino, 421.

94. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child (Madonna della Candeletta)*, c. 1489, tempera and gold on panel, 219 × 74.5 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. Part of the altarpiece for the Cathedral of San Venanzio, Camerino.

95. Anon, *Madonna di Santa Maria in Via*, early 14<sup>th</sup> century, on panel, Church of Santa Maria in Via, Camerino.

96. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome and George, predella with Saint Catherine, The Penitent Saint Jerome, The Nativity, The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian and Saint George and the Dragon (The Madonna della Rondine)*, in original frame, 1491-4, tempera and gold on panel, main panel 150.5 x 107 cm, The National Gallery, London. From the Ottoni Chapel in the Church of San Francesco, Matelica.

97. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Aquinas* (x-radiograph detail of fig. 65 showing parallel incisions)

98. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint John the Baptist* (detail of fig. 82 showing barb on uncut edge).

99. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Catherine* (detail of fig. 32 showing scalloped incisions to indicate the frame, punchwork following incisions, preparation extending freely and dark coating).

100. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child* (detail of fig. 78 showing pen and ink sketch of a face on the exposed ground).

101. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child* (infrared detail of fig. 78 showing the veil underdrawing).

102. Carlo Crivelli, *Saints Peter and Dominic* (infrared detail of fig. 37 showing Dominic's face).

103. Carlo Crivelli, *The Dead Christ* (infrared detail of fig. 7 showing sketchy lines on Christ's torso).

104. Carlo Crivelli, *The Dead Christ Supported by Angels* (infrared detail of fig. 130 showing sketchy lines on arms and neck).

105. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Peter*, c.1470-3, pen and brown ink and wash on paper, 20.5 x 15.5 cm, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Harvard.

106. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Peter* (infrared details), c.1470-3, tempera and gold on panel, 74 x 54 cm, Polo Museale di San Francesco, Montefiore dell'Aso. Part of the altarpiece for the Church of San Francesco, Montefiore dell'Aso.

107. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child* (infrared detail of fig. 78 showing the sleeping Christ Child).

108. Carlo Crivelli *Saint Sebastian* (infrared detail of fig. 31 showing the fur lining of the cape).
109. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Sebastian* (detail of fig. 31 showing the fur lining of the cape).
110. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Catherine* (detail of fig. 32 showing blue skirt with incisions).
111. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Stephen* (RTI detail of fig. 91 showing relief).
112. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child* (detail of fig. 78 showing halo).
113. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Peter* (detail of fig. 47 showing crucifix in relief).
114. Giovanni Ambrogio Bevilacqua, *The Virgin and Child*, c.1500-10, tempera on linen with gold and silver thread, silver and gilt sequins, studs and silk ribbon, 41 x 47 cm, Castello Sforzesco, Milan.
115. Giovanni d'Alemagna and Antonio Vivarini, *The Coronation of the Virgin* (detail of attendant saints showing *pastiglia*), 1444, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 230 x 180 cm, The Church of San Pantalon, Venice.
116. Jacobello del Fiore, *Justice Triptych* (detail of *Saint Michael*), 1421, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 208 x 490 cm, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.
117. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Stephen* (RTI detail of fig. 91 showing tooled ground).
118. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Peter* (detail of fig. 47 showing drapery).
119. Carlo Crivelli, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1493, tempera and gold on panel, 225 x 255 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. Part of the Altarpiece painted for the high altar of the Church of San Francesco, Fabriano, reconstructed in fig. 92.
120. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Michael*, c. 1479/80, tempera, gold, *pastiglia* and gems on panel, 91 x 26 cm, The National Gallery, London. Part of the smaller altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno, reconstructed in fig. 25.
121. Carlo Crivelli, *The Penitent Saint Jerome*, 1491-4, tempera on panel, The National Gallery, London. Predella panel from the *Madonna della Rondine* (fig. 96).
122. Carlo Crivelli, *The Agony in the Garden*, 1468, tempera and gold on panel, Church of SS. Lorenzo, Silvestro e Ruffino, Massa Fermana. Predella panel from the altarpiece for Massa Fermana (fig. 7).
123. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin Annunciate*, 1482, tempera and gold on panel, 60.2 x 45.5 cm, Städel Museum, Frankfurt. Pinnacle from the altarpiece for the Church of San Domenico, reconstructed in fig. 20.
124. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Sebastian*, tempera on panel, 42 x 10 cm, Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan. Panel from the frame of an altarpiece (possibly *Christ Giving the Keys to Saint Peter*, fig. 21).

125. Workshop of Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child with Saints John the Evangelist, Augustine, John the Baptist and Mark*, 1481, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 90 x 150 cm, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome.
126. Carlo and Vittore Crivelli, *The Monte San Martino Altarpiece*, c. 1480, tempera and gold on panel, 285 x 227 cm, Church of San Martino, Monte San Martino.
127. Carlo Crivelli, *The Coronation of the Virgin* (detail of fig. 119 showing foliage on the throne with different types of gilding.)
128. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Jerome*, c. 1479/80, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 91 x 26 cm, The National Gallery, London. Part of the smaller altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno, reconstructed in fig. 25.
129. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Peter Martyr*, c. 1479/80, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 91 x 26 cm, The National Gallery, London. Part of the smaller altarpiece from the Church of San Domenico, Ascoli Piceno, reconstructed in fig. 25.
130. Carlo Crivelli, *The Dead Christ Supported by Two Angels*, c.1470-3, tempera and gold on panel, 72.4 x 55.2 cm, The National Gallery, London.
131. Paolo di Giovanni Fei, *Madonna and Child*, 1370s, tempera and gold on panel, 87 x 59.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
132. Michelino da Besozzo *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine with Saints John the Baptist and Anthony Abbot* (detail showing crowns with indentations from lost gems), c. 1410-20, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 75 x 58 cm, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena.
133. Gentile da Fabriano, *The Adoration of the Magi* (detail showing the Three Kings), 1423, tempera and gold on panel, 300 x 282 cm, Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence.
134. Pisanello, *Saint George and the Princess* (detail showing relief inserts), 1436-8, fresco with gilding and relief, Pellegrini Chapel of the Church of Sant'Anatasia, Verona.
135. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Lucy* (detail of fig. 33 with pearls).
136. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Madonna and Child with the Birth of the Virgin and the Meeting of Joachim and Anne (Bartolini Tondo)*, late 1460s, tempera on panel, 135 cm, Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.
137. Donatello, *The Virgin and Child (The Pazzi Madonna)*, 1425-30, marble, 74.5 x 69.5 cm, Bode-Museum, Berlin.
138. Pacino di Bonaguida, *The Chiarito Tabernacle*, 1340s, gilded gesso and tempera on panel 101.3 x 113.5 cm, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.
139. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Peter* (detail of fig. 47 showing *pastiglia* code proud of the cope)
140. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child* (detail of fig. 78 showing the collar).

141. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Peter* (detail of fig. 47 showing mitre).
142. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Michael* (detail of fig. 120 showing pearl head piece).
143. Giovanni d'Alemagna and Antonio Vivarini, *The Charity Triptych* (detail of fig. 5 showing the processional cross held by Saint Gregory).
144. Michele Giambono, *The Virgin and Child* (detail), c.1450, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 27 x 60 cm, Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca d'Oro, Venice.
145. Carlo Crivelli, *Virgin and Child with St. Francis, St. Bernardino of Siena, and the Donor Fra Bernardino Ferretti*, c.1490, tempera and gold on panel, 98 x 82.5 cm, The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.
146. Marchigian/Abruzzo School, *The Virgin and Child (Madonna di Elce)*, mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, Museo Diocesano, Camerino.
147. Marchigian, *Crucifix*, 13<sup>th</sup> century, Church of San Salvatore, Arquata del Tronto, Ascoli Piceno.
148. Marchigian/Abruzzo School, *The Virgin and Child (Madonna di Elce)* (detail of fig. 146 showing necklace).
149. Niccolò di Liberatore, called Alunno, *The Crucifixion*, 1463, tempera and gold on panel with polychrome sculpture, 302.5 x 165.5 cm, Duomo, Foligno.
150. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint Peter* (detail of fig. 47 in raking light).
151. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint George* (detail of fig. 17 showing horse's bridle with *pastiglia* reinforced by painted shadows).
152. Carlo Crivelli, *The Annunciation* (detail of fig. 2 showing the shadow cast by Emidius).
153. Giovanni Battista Gaulli, *Triumph of the Name of Jesus* (detail showing shadows painted onto gilded stucco), 1661-79, fresco, gold and stucco, Church of Il Gesù, Rome.
154. Rogier van der Weyden, *The Deposition*, 1438, oil on panel, 204.5 x 261.5 cm, Museo del Prado, Madrid.
155. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child*, c. 1460-8, tempera and oil on panel, 62 x 41 cm, The San Diego Museum of Art.
156. Carlo Crivelli, *The Madonna and Child*, c.1480, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 45.9 x 33.6 cm, Museo Carrara, Bergamo.
157. Byzantine, *Mother of God and Child Artokosta* (separated from its revetment after a recent restoration) c. 1425, tempera on panel, silver repoussé, 80 x 56 cm Artokosta Monastery, Morea Now: Church of San Samuel, Venice.

158. Italian/Byzantine, *The Virgin Annunciate*, icon 13<sup>th</sup> century, revetment late 13<sup>th</sup> century, tempera on panel, gilt-silver, 48 x 36 cm, Fermo Cathedral.
159. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child* (detail of fig. 3 showing the Christ Child's cruciform halo).
160. Francesco del Cossa, *The Annunciation* (detail showing Gabriel's halo), 1470-2, tempera on panel, 139 x 113.5 cm, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden.
161. Piero della Francesca, *Polyptych of Saint Anthony* (detail of the Virgin's halo), c. 1470, oil and tempera on panel, 338 x 230 cm, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia.
162. Giotto, *The Last Judgement* (detail showing the angels with raised halos and shields), fresco, c.1305, The Arena Chapel, Padua.
163. Carlo Crivelli, *The Immaculate Conception* (detail of fig. 67 showing punchwork).
164. Carlo Crivelli, *The Vision of the Blessed Gabriele* (detail of fig. 11 showing the Virgin).
165. Carlo Crivelli, *The Pietà*, 1488, tempera and gold on panel, 105 x 205 cm, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome. With fig., part of the altarpiece from the Church of San Pietro in Muralto, Camerino.
166. Piero della Francesca *The Polyptych of Saint Anthony (The Annunciation)*, c.1470, oil and tempera on panel, 338 x 230 cm, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia.
167. Carlo Crivelli, *The Coronation of the Virgin* (detail of fig. 119 showing Saints John the Baptist and Catherine).
168. Carlo Crivelli, *Saints Venantius and Peter Martyr*, 1482, tempera, gold and *pastiglia* on panel, 167 x 63 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. Part of the altarpiece for the Church of San Domenico, Camerino, reconstructed in fig. 20.
169. Carlo Crivelli, *Saints Peter and Dominic* (detail of fig. 37 showing orphrey).
170. Carlo Crivelli, *The Coronation of the Virgin* (detail of fig. 119 showing overlapping cloths).
171. Sandro Botticelli, *Venus and Mars* (detail of Venus), tempera and oil on panel, 69.2 x 173.4 cm, The National Gallery, London.
172. Carlo Crivelli, *The Dead Christ Supported by Two Angels* (detail of fig. 130 showing tempera technique in Angel's face)
173. Carlo Crivelli, *Saint John the Baptist* (detail of fig. 82 showing hair).
174. Donatello, *Saint John the Evangelist* (detail of head), 1408-15, marble, 212 x 91 x 62 cm, Museo dell'Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence.
175. Southern-Netherlandish, *Esther and Ahasuerus*, 1510-20, tapestry woven with silk and wool, 304 x 390 cm, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

176. Antonio and Piero del Pollaiuolo, *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, 1475, oil on panel, 291.5 x 202.6 cm, The National Gallery, London.

177. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child*, 1482, tempera, gold, *pastiglia* and gems on panel, 190.5 x 78 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. Part of the altarpiece for the Church of San Domenico, Camerino, reconstructed in fig. 20.

178. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child*, c. 1480, tempera and gold on panel, 21 x 15 cm, Pinacoteca Civica "Francesco Podesti," Ancona. From the Sacristy of the Church of San Francesco, Ancona.

179. Leonardo da Vinci, *The Mona Lisa*, c.1503-17, oil on panel, 77 x 53 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

180. Leonardo da Vinci, *The Mona Lisa* (detail of fig. 179 showing *sfumato*).

181. Roman, *Lararium* (detail of the side with marble 'face'), c. AD 50-79, Peristyle of the House of Gilded Cupids, Pompeii.

182. Carlo Crivelli, *Saints Anthony Abbot and Lucy*, 1470, tempera, gold and *pastiglia*, 34.5 x 47.5 cm, National Museum, Krakow. Part of the altarpiece from the Church of San Giorgio, Porto San Giorgio, near Fermo.

183. Carlo Crivelli, *Saints Venantius and Peter Martyr* (detail of fig. 168 with tip of spear against the gold ground pattern).

184. Carlo Crivelli, *The Virgin and Child* (detail of fig. 177 with fruits, flowers and frieze).

185. Jan van Eyck, *The Virgin and Child with Canon Joris Van der Paele*, 1434-6, oil on panel, 122 x 157 cm, Groeninge museum, Bruges.

186. Niccolò di Liberatore, called Alunno, *Angels bearing an Inscription*, 1492, tempera on panel, Musée du Louvre, Paris. Predella panel, part of the altarpiece in the Church of San Niccolò, Foligno (fig. 187).

187. Niccolò di Liberatore, called Alunno, *Altarpiece of Donna Brigida*, 1492, tempera on panel, 330 x 288 cm, Church of San Niccolò, Foligno.