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I have proposed two different tendencies toward cast shadows among Siennese painters in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>1</sup>. The first comprises a non-naturalistic approach represented by Giovanni di Paolo (active by 1417, died 1482) and Sassetta (active by 1423, died 1450). These artists depicted cast shadows only when the specific subject matter required a light source within the picture itself. Cast shadows were used to specify that a sacred significance may have been contained in the presence of a light source, and this was carried out entirely as a result of the artists' direct contact with Gentile da Fabriano (1360/70–1427). This can be established from the fact that Gentile had frequently visited Siena to depict the image of the *Virgin and Child with Saints* on the exterior of the Palazzo dei Notai at Piazza del Campo from 1423–1425, prior to the generally acknowledged dates.<sup>2</sup>

In this essay, I elaborate on a second more naturalistic approach represented by Domenico di Bartolo (active 1420–1444/45) and Lorenzo Vecchietta (1410–1480), who from their direct relationship with Florentine artists, studied cast shadows more systematically. This can be confirmed through their collaboration on the cycle of frescoes adorning the Pellegrinaio (Pilgrim's Hall) inside the Spedale di Santa Maria della Scala (Santa Maria della Scala Hospital).

According to payment records from 1440 to 1444 for the frescoes adorning the sidewalls under the supervision of the hospital's director Giovanni di Francesco Buzzichelli, we know that this fresco commission was a major project for the period.<sup>3</sup> The works that remain in the Pellegrinaio, which presently exists as a public

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<sup>1</sup>. Koichi Toyama, "Light and Shadow in Sassetta: The Stigmatization of Saint Francis and the Sermons of Bernardino da Siena", in *Sassetta: The Borgo San Sepolcro Altarpiece I*, ed. Machtelt Israëls, Florence-Leiden, 2009, pp. 305–315.

<sup>2</sup>. Keith Christiansen, "Sassetta a Century Later", in *ibid.*, esp. pp. 28–29.

<sup>3</sup>. Cf. Pietro Torriti, *Gli affreschi del Pellegrinaio*, Siena, 1987; Daniella Gallavotti Cavallero, *Lo*

Figure 1. View of the Pellegrinaio, Spedale di Santa Maria della Scala, Siena

museum, consist of six walls painted by Domenico di Bartolo, one wall by Vecchietta, and another wall overseen by Priamo della Quercia. Apart from the wall overseen by Priamo della Quercia, the rest incorporate a singular source of light from the large window situated at the backend wall of this long hall. That is, these frescoes located to the left of the window, which illustrate the establishment and history of the hospital, take into account the flow of light entering in from the window to their right, and display a consistent direction of shadows (Figure 1). At the same time, like the left wall, the frescoes by Domenico di Bartolo that illustrate the hospital's activities to the right of the window, also display uni-directional shadows which incorporate light from the actual window situated to the left.

In the example by Vecchietta, who had previously painted the Story of Tobias (no longer extant) in the same hall followed by a painting of the *Vision of the Beato Sorore*—Vecchietta's sole extant work situated on the sidewall to the left of the window—the depiction of shadows follow the aforementioned rule and he magnificently simulates the space of the Sienese cathedral through the perfected use of Florentine linear perspective. In addition, if we consider the *Care of the Sick* (Figure 2), one of the four frescoes located on the wall to the right of the window by Domenico di Bartolo (who presumably held an instructive role in the fresco production of the same space), the artist uses the techniques of cast shadow and linear perspective to depict a comprehensive scene of numerous hospital pa-

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*Spedale di Santa Maria della Scala in Siena, Vicenda di una committenza artistica*, Pisa, 1985; for the documents see especially Carl Brandon Strehlke, Domenico di Bartolo, Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia Univ., 1985, pp. 261–268.

Figure 2. Domenico di Bartolo, *The Care of the Sick*, 1440, The Pellegrinaio, Ospedale di Santa Maria della Scala, Siena

Figure 3. Domenico di Bartolo, detail of Figure 2

tients being treated. In these motifs, which are filled with an overabundance of the hospital's daily treatment activities and penetrate with naturalist attitude, one can observe the cast shadows of a brawling dog and cat in the opposite direction of the window as well as a level of naturalistic transparency and precision at par with Northern painters (Figure 3) from the depictions of the glass beaker held in the doctor's hands to the air bubbles at the bottom of a copper wash basin. At the far end of this scene's facade, a window has been left open, and the foreshortening of the multiple bays directly across makes the Pellegrinaio appear as if it has been rotated at a 90 degree angle. Spectators positioned inside the room may recognize that the actual light entering the Pellegrinaio also illuminates the pictorial space of the frescoes. Here, one may perhaps gain the illusion that the fictive space depicted on the frescoes is continuous with the actual space of the room.

The systematic use of shade and cast shadows based on an actual light source from a window displayed in these example of works was first practiced in the mid-1420s by Masaccio and Masolino at the Brancacci Chapel in Florence. After the works at Brancacci Chapel and the Trinity fresco at Santa Maria Novella were produced, one can perceive the beginnings of this system appearing in the frescoes at Basilica di San Clemente (1428–31) and Castiglione Olona (c. 1435). At the request of Cardinal Branda Castiglione, Masolino completed both frescoes after

Massaccio's death (1428/29). Following these two examples, more critical emphasis should be given to the fact that for the first time after Brancacci near Florence in the same Tuscan region of Siena, Siennese artists practiced this system to a state of perfection in their frescoes. One can potentially explain the innovative skill of Vecchietta and how he inherited the Florentine system (originating from the frescoes of Masaccio and Masolino in Florence) based on his clear participation in the Castiglione Olona and most probably Basilica di San Clemente under Masolino's supervision<sup>4</sup>. On the other hand, one can assume several responses to the question of how Domenico di Bartolo acquired this Florentine system. With regards to Domenico, Vasari has written how the Siennese artist received important commissions and produced two panel works around 1436<sup>5</sup>. However, the panels are difficult to identify and only a few fragments remain from frescoes in the sacristy of the Cathedral of Siena according to payment records from 1435–39<sup>6</sup>. In addition, for panel works produced prior to the major fresco project at Pellegrinaio, while incomplete, we can confirm several works from the 1430s, but it is difficult to identify a clear method in their depictions of light and shadow.

## Young Domenico di Bartolo in Florence

Domenico di Bartolo Ghezzi is first documented in 1420 for an unidentified project in the Cathedral of Siena<sup>7</sup> and is listed in the rolls of the painter's guild first compiled in 1428. In the work first signed and dated as 1433, *The Madonna of Humility and Four Music-Making Angels* (Pinacoteca of Siena, Figure 4), we can identify several Florentine stylistic forms. The bodily expression of the lively infant Christ and the voluminous depiction of the Virgin whose body is revealed under her transparent garb differ radically from the Gothic expression of Siennese painters during the same period, and the humanist script inscribed on the scroll at the foot of the Virgin strongly evokes Florence. And yet, this voluminous style has been attributed to the artist's interest in the Siennese sculpture of Jacopo della Quercia (1371/74–1438), and with regards

<sup>4</sup>. See Roberto Longhi, "Ricerche su Giovanni di Francesco", *Pinacotheca*, 1928, pp. 34–38 (reprinted in *Opere Complete*, IV, Florence 1968, in part p. 24) : Steffi Roettgen, *Fresques Italiennes de la Renaissance 1400–1470*, French ed., Paris, 1996, pp. 118–165; Keith Christiansen, Laurence B. Kanter, Carl Brandon Strehlke, *Painting in Renaissance Siena 1420–1500*, ex. cat. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY), New York, 1988, p. 258.

<sup>5</sup>. Vasari (1568), ed. Milanese, II, 1878, pp. 39–41.

<sup>6</sup>. Documents see C. B. Strehlke, *op. cit.* (1985), pp. 247–255.

<sup>7</sup>. Document see C. B. Strehlke, *op. cit.* (1985), p. 244; this document has been speculated by Monika Butzek in her *ad vocem Ghezzi*, in *Saur Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*, LIII, (München-Leipzig, 2007), pp. 10–13.

Figure 4. Domenico di Bartolo, *Madonna of Humility and Four Music-Making Angels*, 1433, Pinacoteca of Siena

to the motif of the halo adorned with distinctive wings, the work's Siense qualities have been emphasized based on the teachings contained in the sermons of St. Bernardino.<sup>8</sup> In a recent essay, a close association with SS. Girolamo e Francesco's *disciplinati* company in Siena has been strongly suggested based on the wording and musical notes engraved on the gold background, and one senses a narrative that substantiates this work to be situated within Siena's religious milieu<sup>9</sup>.

One may also observe a similarity, as Margrit Lisner has first identified, to Luca della Robbia's *Tambourine Players*, which was conceived to be the very first *Cantoria* panel intended for the apse of the Cathedral of Florence. Although, this relationship pertains only to fragments and does not display an overt reference, it would have been impossible to reference this sculptural work during this period unless one had been present in Florence. (Figure 5-6)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup>. Carl Brandon Strehlke, "La *Madonna dell'Umiltà* di Domenico di Bartolo e San Bernardino", *Arte Cristiana*, no. 705 (1984), pp. 381–390.

<sup>9</sup>. Timothy J. Dickey, "An Undiscovered Siense *Lauda*, *Adoramus te, Christe*, and the Provenance of Domenico di Bartolo's *Madonna of Humility* (1433)", *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, vol. 34, no. 1 (Summer 2008), pp. 91–123.

<sup>10</sup>. Margrit Lisner, *Luca della Robbia. Sängerkanzel*, Stuttgart, 1960, pp. 62–71; Luciano Bellosi, "Per Luca della Robbia", *Prospettiva*, vol. 27 (1981), pp. 62–71; Koichi Toyama, "On the Eve of

Figure 5. Domenico di Bartolo, detail of Figure 4

Figure 6. Luca della Robbia, detail of *Tambourine Players*, c. 1432, from *Cantoria*, Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence

Here, I would like to propose a new stylistic affinity with the Florentine sculptor, Luca della Robbia. Domenico's *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Peter and Paul* (National Gallery, Washington, Figure 7), generally dated before *Madonna of Humility and Four Music-Making Angels*, presents a group of saints that displays the *Sacra Conversazione* in Florentine type, but one can also observe a resemblance to an early relief sculpture attributed to Luca, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saint Stephen, Saint Catherine of Alexandria and a Donor* (Private Collection, Florence, Figure 8)<sup>11</sup>. Despite Domenico's gold background, the saints

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*Cantoria*: Luca della Robbia's Early Years", *Journal of the Science of Arts*, ed. Mita Society for the Science of Arts (Keio Univ. Tokyo), no. 1 (1997), pp. 100–11.

<sup>11</sup>. *Donatello e I Suoi. Scultura fiorentina del primo Rinascimento*, ed. Alan Phipps Darr and Giorgio

Figure 7. Domenico di Bartolo, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saints Peter and Paul*, c. 1432, National Gallery of Art, Washington

Figure 8. Luca della Robbia, *Madonna and Child Enthroned with Saint Stephen, Saint Catherine of Alexandria and a Donor*, c. 1430, Private Collection, Florence

are each set against an architectural backdrop and placed within the confined spaces at the foreground, and we can see a close resemblance in the pose of infant Christ nestled in the Virgin's breast<sup>12</sup>. Moreover it is quite noticeable that the Virgin is enthroned in a shell niche topped by three classical putti holding a garland. Here the two artists also share the inverted depiction of the shell motif displayed in a semi-dome with the hinge above from which the ribs and furrows issue (this is generally depicted in the opposite direction). These rare inverted shells are displayed in a few panels of the North Bronze Doors by Lorenzo Ghiberti as well (*Christ Among the Doctors*, *Christ before Pilate*), and while this may attest to Luca's presence in Ghiberti's workshop, it is thought that this motif was rarely in use around 1430<sup>13</sup>. As a result, we can strongly assume that the young Domenico may have left Siena,

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Bonsanti, ex. cat. (Forte di Belvedere, Florence), Milan, 1986, pp. 204–205.

12. The close resemblance in the pose of infant Christ between the two works has been pointed out by Giovanna Damiani, "Domenico di Bartolo: La Madonna dell'Umiltà", *Una scuola per Piero. Luce, colore e prospettiva nella formazione fiorentina di Piero della Francesca*, ed. Luciano Bellosi, Venice, 1992, pp. 59–63, esp. p. 63.

13. We have to admit that after 1440's the inverted shell niche reappeared in Fra Angelico, Piero della Francesca, Botticelli, and Filippino Lippi.



spent several years in Florence, and became acquainted with Florentine sculptors well enough to observe their works in progress. Given the stylistic affinity between Luca della Robbia and Filippo Lippi, we might consider a tri-fold relationship with the additional presence of the young Siennese Domenico during these years<sup>14</sup>.

Although the Florentine style of Domenico's works displays bright, transparent use of colors and figure modeling based a uniform source of light, we are still unable to observe the cast shadows originated by Masaccio and Masolino. While Carl Brandon Strehlke has elucidated a speculative examination on the use of light in the *Madonna of Humility*, the work does not clearly manifest cast shadows. These works may have been produced just after the artist returned to Siena from Florence. Soon after this period, Domenico received commissions for the Cathedral of Siena, presenting a portrait drawing of the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund during his visit to Siena (July 12, 1432-April 25, 1433), and under the supervision of Jacopo della Quercia, would begin working on the Siena Cathedral commissions in rapid succession. These included *The Emperor Sigismund Enthroned with Counselors*, a pavement plaque for the Siena Cathedral<sup>15</sup> and *The Lives of the Four Patron Saints of Siena*, a fresco inside the sacristy.

## Domenico di Bartolo circa 1436–38

In the latter half of the 1430s, Domenico received frequent payments for the fresco production of *The Lives of the Four Patron Saints of Siena*, but there is an interruption in the records for nearly one and a half years from August 21, 1437 to March 23, 1439<sup>16</sup>. In addition, the records indicate that Domenico accepted commissions outside Siena from 1436 to 1438. In fact, what remains is a commission he received for an altarpiece in Sant'Agostino located in Domenico's hometown of Asciano (on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1437)<sup>17</sup>, and as mentioned above, two works in Florence from around 1436 according to Vasari.

Among the works to be dated during this period, there are at least two panel works that include cast shadows.

The first of these works is a polyptych (Figure 9) originally produced for the Convent of Santa Giuliana in Perugia, and currently resides at the Galleria

<sup>14</sup>. See especially Andrea De Marchi, "Ancora che l'arte fusse diversa", *I Della Robbia e l'arte nuova della scultura invetriata*, ed. Giancarlo Gentilini, ex.cat. (Fiesole, Basilica di Sant'Alessandro), Florence, 1998, pp. 17–30, esp. pp. 29–30 note 1.

<sup>15</sup>. C. B. Strehlke, *op.cit.* (1985), pp. 41–52, 200–201, 245–246.

<sup>16</sup>. There is one payment record in 1437 that is undated. See C. B. Strehlke, *op.cit.* (1985), p. 252.

<sup>17</sup>. C. B. Strehlke, *op.cit.* (1985), pp. 188–189, 251.

Figure 9. Domenico di Bartolo, Polyptych, 1438, Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, Perugia

Nazionale dell'Umbria in the same city.<sup>18</sup> There, the date 1438 and the artist's signature as well as the name of Santa Giuliana Convent abbess, Antonia Buccoli is documented as the commissioner. There is a clear display of cast shadows in the predella of the same altarpiece. The configuration of scenes on the three panels of the predella show how light flows far and wide from the left of the frame, and the shadows cast on the figures and architectural buildings are depicted in fine detail particularly in the scene that depicts *Feast of Herod and the Decapitation of St. John the Baptist* in the central predella (Figure 10). One can see how the shadow of the Baptist who prays and submits his head outside the window is reflected on the bottom wall as if tracing its contours. However, apart from one section, we do not see a clear display of cast shadows on the main register. This one section involves a clear and rich shadow cast on the scroll that displays the artist's signature. One can point to how this idea may be derived from Dante's "Inferno" in the *Divine Comedy* that only living beings in our world are capable of intercepting light and thus of casting shadows<sup>19</sup>. In contrast to the iconic figures of worship (the enthroned Virgin and the four Saints) depicted on the main panel, the artist's signature exhibited in front, which exists as an element of reality continuous with the viewer, is depicted with a clear shadow and is presented in contrast to the sacred figures

<sup>18</sup>. Francesco Santi, *Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria. Dipinti, sculture, e oggetti di età romanica e gotica*, 1969, Rome, pp. 107–109. On the shadows cast by the scroll with the artist's signature and detailed photograph, see K. Toyama, *op. cit.* (2009), esp. pp. 308–309.

<sup>19</sup>. H. Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie*, Munchen, 2001, pp. 189–211; K. Toyama, *op. cit.* (2009), p. 309.

Figure 10. Domenico di Bartolo, *Feast of Herod and the Decapitation of St. John the Baptist*, detail of Figure 9

(above). If one were to say conclusively, this work displays the representation of cast shadows not observed in the early period of Domenico's works, but one can recognize that there is a difference in the representation of cast shadows depending on the subject matter depicted inside the same work. That is, while there are striking examples of cast shadows in the narrative scenes and in the artist's signature, they do not appear in the iconic scenes. This proves that at this stage, Domenico did not possess a consistent naturalistic attitude toward cast shadow representation, and among the two approaches of cast shadows proposed by Sienese artists in the early 15<sup>th</sup> Century stated at the beginning of this essay, he does not display the latter's clear naturalistic approach.

There is one other panel that displays cast shadows. I am referring to the fragment of the *Madonna and Child Enthroned* currently housed in the Princeton University Art Museum (Figure 11), which Carl Strehlke has tentatively identified from Vasari's records as the high altarpiece of the Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence.<sup>20</sup>

In February 2003, I was able to directly witness and examine this piece together with curator Norman Muller of the Princeton University Art Museum. The back of the panel was protected by a cradle, and thus I was unable to verify the cutting traces on the right, left, and bottom portions. On the pictorial section of the panel, there is a small extended arch that frames the colored and gilded sections,

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<sup>20</sup>. C. B. Strehlke, *op.cit.* (1985), pp. 63, 191–192.

Figure 11. Domenico di Bartolo, *Madonna and Child Enthroned*, c. 1438–39, The Art Museum, Princeton University

but one can see that the arch applied with pastiglia on the spandrel extends along both the left and right sides of the pointed arch as two semicircular arches and thus five arches are currently confirmed to exist in total. However, through infrared reflectography, we were able to clearly identify the beginnings of an additional arch at the lower halves of each side, and that in actuality there were two more semicircular arches to the left and right. Given this fact, the frame of the arch would have extended further down the throne, and therefore, it is very likely that the Virgin was originally depicted as a full-length figure based on its proportions. If we were to observe this in more detail, one can see that the punch marks along the interior of the Virgin's halo are foreshortened along the bottom area of the halo as it comes into contact with the Virgin's head (the very outer row is cut off by the throne, and the punch marks along the second row from the outer edge grow smaller in two-steps, Figure 12). In addition, we confirmed a distinct shadow of the Virgin herself cast on the right-spiraled arm of her throne crafted in intarsia (inlay) (Figure 13). These facts explain that a full-length portrait of the Virgin had been meticulously constructed based on extremely fine craftsmanship, and that it is possible that this was originally conceived as part of a large-scale project. In particular, the evidence of the cast shadow on the throne arm can be linked to Masaccio's first experiments in applying the cast shadow of the Virgin's head onto the background throne in his panel painting, *The Pisa Altarpiece* (1426, London National Gallery). In other words, like Masaccio, Domenico applies cast shadows to the iconic subject of the

Figure 12. Domenico di Bartolo, detail of Figure 11

Figure 13. Domenico di Bartolo, detail of Figure 11

enthroned Madonna. If we were to assume that the system of cast shadows displayed on the Pellegrinaio frescoes of the 1440s reached a point of achievement for Domenico di Bartolo, its display on the iconic scene of this Princeton Madonna and Child can be considered closer to that arrival point than the Perugia Altarpiece date of 1438.

As I have stated above, Carl Strehlke has identified through Vasari's account that this Madonna and Child comprises the high altarpiece of the Santa Maria del Carmine in Florence. This church endured a fire in 1771 when a majority was lost, and thus Strehlke has argued that the figures were transformed into half-length portraits due to the burning of the lower half of the high altarpiece. This investigation strengthens the validity of his attribution, but it is questionable whether we can take the production date of c. 1436 by Vasari at face value.<sup>21</sup> Vasari had in fact specified 'around' 1436 ("intorno agli anni del Signore 1436") particularly in order to conceive a relative date span over which to group the two works together. From the

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<sup>21</sup>. The presence of this piece in the Santa Maria del Carmine (Vasari (1568), ed. Milanesi, II, 1878, p. 41), is confirmed in Baldinucci's 17<sup>th</sup> century records (1681). However, the record does not specifically indicate the location of where this altarpiece resided in the church. Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie dei professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua*, vol. I, 1845, p. 62.

standpoint of the cast shadow rendering, it would be possible to date the production of this altarpiece just after the Perugia altarpiece.

In any case, it is highly unlikely that a roaming foreign Siennese artist without any experience in Florence had received an offer for a high altarpiece at the Santa Maria del Carmine. In other words, I would conclude that he was able to accept such an important commission after having built up strong connections from his first visit to Florence around 1430. As is well-known, Santa Maria del Carmine houses Masaccio and Masolino's first display of cast shadows in the Brancacci chapel, and this was also the place where Filippo Lippi, whose connections to Domenico have been questioned, resided as a friar. As for the period of Domenico's absence in Siena based on the missing records between late 1437 to early 1439, one may conjecture that he visited Florence or Pisa, and re-experienced a new encounter with Florence where he had spent his early life.