

Works Cited

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that sin. Over one third of Florence's population was ravaged by the plague and no one knew why. Christianity dominated the worldview, especially in Europe. The power of the Church was an absolute; it was a government, religion and mindset that were deeply rooted in its people. The people's faith and devotion to the Church influenced their interpretation of the plague. The more people gave themselves to the church; it was thought that they would not get the plague. The more they paid the church; they believed the lesser chance they would get the plague. Everything the Florentines lived for was rooted in pride for their city and faith.

The doors were the greatest sculptural project in the history of the city and must have made expectations so magnificence that the doors would be unbeaten. However, in the 1340's, Florence was unexpectedly ravaged by a series of calamities: bank failures, crop failures, famines, political unrest, and worst of all, the Plague. The plague would eliminate almost half of the city's population and put an end to, "grandiose artistic projects like that of the Baptistery doors."⁶ There would be no more expensive bronze doors or any more work on the Baptistery for the rest of the Trecento in Florence. The next time the Baptistery is worked on is in the early years of the fifteenth century.

weaknesses of humanity. The concept of opposing forces of good and evil expressed in a broad range of moral qualities, virtues and vices are one of the most dominant themes in the history of Christian art. The Virtues are presented in a group of seven, but Pisano did not want to compromise the design, so he added the additional Virtue of humility. There are four Cardinal Virtues, Fortitude, Temperance, Justice and Prudence. The additional four are Theological Virtues, Faith, Hope, Charity and Humility. The Virtues serves as a, “spiritual and physical foundation for the narrative scenes situated above, and appropriately so, since they alluded to the ideals by which John the Baptist was thought to have lived his life by.”⁴

Humility is one of the more rare virtues in religious and secular allegory, and was added to the doors to keep aesthetic balance. Normally, Humility is shown with the vice of Pride. Her bent head suggests the idea, “that the humbler one is, the higher the spirit rises.”¹ When the ornate, bronze doors were installed in 1336, the members of the Calimala Guild and the citizens of Florence were proud. Florence was a city on the rise and urbanization was experienced by all Italian cities. In this time, Florence’s population doubled. More importantly, Florence saw an explosion in international trade and innovations in finance. A new class of bankers and merchants replaced the old noble families as the center of power. These sudden profits and sense of pride were believed to contribute to the plague. They believed that God was highly offended by the sin of pride and the plague was a result of



⁴ Moskowitz, Anita F. The Sculpture of Andrea and Nino Pisano.

¹ Cambas, Sarah. Priceless Portals: The Bronze doors of the Florentine Baptistery.

movements in the architecture reflect the designs and patterns in the quatrefoil.⁴ The Baptistery reliefs are typically viewed as a homogenous piece of art, but there are many subtle changes in the composition, figure style, and freedom in handling the landscape elements.

On certain liturgical occasions, the doors of the Cathedral and Baptistery were opened and a group of Christian converts would pass from the Cathedral to the Baptistery to be baptized.³ The baptism of Christian directly correlates to the narrative of the panel that represents the life of St. John. Pisano organized the panels by focusing on St. John as a prophet and as a martyr. The left side of the door pertains to the preaching and public life of St. John, while the right focuses on scenes of his martyrdom and events of his life.

The bronze doors were meant to tell a narrative so that all citizens in the city of Florence could understand the story of St. John. Art is a powerful tool that could educate the masses during a time when few people could read. Since the doors were used as religious propaganda to show the public how to act and live a holy life, the doors are characterized by the clarity and simplicity. In order for the public to understand the panels, it was essential to focus on the main characters and eliminate any extraneous details that were not as important. The Baptistery provides a set, “of meanings that complements its imposing physical presence.”⁴ The building itself symbolizes a gateway to paradise or a portal into heaven.

The two lower registers of the bronze doors show eight Virtues. Virtues and Vices are essential concepts in moral philosophy because they represent the strengths and

⁴ Moskowitz, Anita F. The Sculpture of Andrea and Nino Pisano.

doors were completed, the city was ravaged by the Plague and other unfortunate events, marking this the last of expensive commissioned art until the early fifteenth century.

The Baptistery of San Giovanni represents an intricate historical precedent of Italian art. Pisano's doors contain twenty-eight quatrefoil panels; twenty narrate the holy and devoted life of St. John the Baptist. The bottom eight panels depict the seated personifications of Virtues. Andrea Pisano was trained as a goldsmith and sculptor in a small town under the control of Pisa. Once the design for the doors was finished, which took one year and nine months, the team began the casting process. The doors demonstrate, "a significant change from previous designs in their harmonious balance of line and form, combined with a highly sophisticated technique of metalworking."¹ The twenty panels that represent the life of St. John the Baptist read in the manner of a book, from right to left and top to bottom. The different scenes are grouped by setting. Five take place in landscapes clustered together in the middle left valve and, "the remaining scenes, predominantly architectural, positioned everywhere else."² The quatrefoil enriches the grid pattern of the doors and provides an instant frame for the individual narratives. In addition, the quatrefoil has special implications because the bronze background against the gilded figures creates an imaginary picture plane.³ The austerity of the images, in which strongly projecting figures are set against the broad flat ground, are relieved by the drapery rhythms that inset against the broad flat ground. The drapery style is not homogeneous and it is employed for structural and decorative effects. Although the design is primarily rectangular, contrast and balance are key noted in the internal design as they are in the framework as a whole. Diagonal and circular

¹ Clark, Kenneth. The Florence Baptistery Doors.

² Cambas, Sarah. Priceless Portals: The Bronze doors of the Florentine Baptistery.

³ Moskowitz, Anita F. The Sculpture of Andrea and Nino Pisano.

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Pisano's South Doors of San Giovanni

The Arte della Calimala, one of the most prosperous guilds in Florence, the epicenter of Italy, commissioned a set of bronze doors in 1330 (completed in 1336) by Andrea Pisano. Now located at the southern entrance of the Baptistery, the doors represent the life of Saint John the Baptist, the patron Saint of Florence. The doors symbolized pride the Florentines had for their city and a prosperous, glorious future that would rival the bronze doors in Siena and Pisa. The doors were used as religious propaganda to show every citizen how to live a faithful, devoted Christian life. Saint John was the example that everyone should follow to ensure less time in purgatory and a faster transition into heaven. One of the most interesting aspects of the doors are the eight virtues at the bottom on the doors. Normally, there are only seven virtues, but the eighth virtue, humility, was added to create more symmetrical doors. Humility is the absence of pride, and Florentines had an enormous amount of pride. We are taught to think pride is a good thing, but pride functions only when comparing others to yourself. However, once the

