

FIVE CONTRACTS FOR ITALIAN RENAISSANCE PAINTING COMMISSIONS

Contract of Pietro Perugino with the Benedictine Monks of S. Pietro at Perugia

This is the contract for an altarpiece for the main altar of S. Pietro in Perugia.

In the name of the Lord, amen. In the year of our Lord 1495, in the thirteenth Indiction, at the time of the most Holy Father in Christ, Pope Alexander VI, ruling by Divine Providence, the eighth day of March. Drawn up in Perugia in the monastery of St. Peter in the presence of the following witnesses: Eusebio di Jacopo of Porta Santa Susanna of Perugia, Gianfrancesco Ciambello of Porta Sole of Perugia. The most Reverend Father in Christ, D. Lucianus of Florence, Abbot of the monastery of St. Peter of the Benedictine Order and of the congregation of Santa Giustina at Perugia, and D. Benedetto of Siena, and D. Daniele of Perugia, as the syndics of the order and procurators of the named monastery, with the permission, consent and desire of the above-mentioned Abbot, who is present and consenting, . . have ordered and commissioned the most honorable man, master Pietro Cristoforo of Castel della Pieve, a most accomplished painter, who is present and has accepted the commission, to paint and ornament the picture for the main altar of the church of St. Peter. The picture must be painted in the following way:

In the rectangular panel, the Ascension of our Lord, Jesus Christ, with the figure of the glorious Virgin Mary, the Twelve Apostles and some angels and other ornaments, as may seem suitable to the painter.

In the semicircle above, supported by two angels, should be painted the figure of God the Almighty Father.

The predella below is to be painted and adorned with stories according to the desire of the present Abbot. The columns, however, and the mouldings and all other ornamentation of the panel should be embellished with fine gold and other fine colors, as will be most fitting, so that the panel will be beautifully and diligently painted, embellished and gilded from top to bottom as stated above and as it befits a good, experienced, honorable, and accomplished master. It will be executed within the space of the coming two and a half years, all at the cost and expense of the said master Pietro himself. The said master Pietro has promised the Reverend Abbot . . . to carry out this agreement in general and in particular under the penalties herein specified. The painter pledges all his goods, real and movable property, present and future.

This the said master Pietro consented to because the Reverend Father, the Abbot, has promised and agreed with him on the pledge of the monastery and his possessions to the said master Pietro, who is present and is executing this contract: namely, to give to him or to his heirs and actually to pay him for his painting, for paints, gold and other things necessary and suitable for the execution of the said painting, as well as for the ornaments of the said panel, 500 gold ducats, payable within four years, counting from the day on which the painting shall be begun, at the rate of one quarter of the sum each year.

In said account, however, the frame which surrounds the panel is not to be included, nor the ornaments placed at the top of said frame, but only the panel itself with its ornaments. . . .

Contract of Ghirlandaio with the Prior of the Spedale degli Innocenti at Florence

This is the contract for the Adoration of the Magi of 1488, still at the Spedale.

Be it known and manifest to whoever sees or reads this document that, at the request of the reverend Messer Francesco di Giovanni Tesori, presently Prior of the Spedale degli Innocenti at Florence, and of Domenico di Tomaso di Curado [Ghirlandaio], painter, I, Fra Bernardo di Francesco of Florence, Jesuate Brother have drawn up this document with my own hand as agreement contract and commission for an

altar panel to go in the church of the abovesaid Spedale degli Innocenti with the agreements and stipulations stated below, namely:

That this day 23 October 1485 the said Francesco commits and entrusts to the said Domenico the painting of a panel which the said Francesco has had made and has provided: the which panel the said Domenico is to make good, that is, pay for; and he is to colour and paint the said panel all with his own hand in the manner shown in a drawing on paper with those figures and in that manner shown in it, in every particular according to what I, Fra Bernardo, think best; not departing from the manner and composition of the said drawing; and he must colour the panel at his own expense with good colours and with powdered gold on such ornaments as demand it, with any other expense incurred on the same panel, and the blue must be ultramarine of the value about four florins the ounce; and he must have made and delivered complete the said panel within thirty months from today; and he must receive as the price of the panel as here described (made at his, that is, the said Domenico's expense throughout) 115 large florins if it seems to me, the above said Fra Bernardo, that it is worth it; and I can go to whoever I think best for an opinion on its value or workmanship, and if it does not seem to me worth the stated price, he shall receive as much less as I, Fra Bernardo, think right; and he must within the terms of the agreement paint the predella of the said panel as I, Fra Bernardo, think good; and he shall receive payment as follows--the said Messer Francesco must give the abovesaid Domenico three large florins every month, starting from 1 November 1485 and continuing after as is stated, every month three large florins. . . .

And if Domenico has not delivered the panel within the abovesaid period of time, he will be liable to a penalty of fifteen large florins; and correspondingly if Messer Francesco does not keep to the abovesaid monthly payments he will be liable to a penalty of the whole amount, that is, once the panel is finished he will have to pay complete and in full the balance of the sum due.

A Contract between Piero della Francesca and the Confraternity of the *Misericordia*

This is the contract for Piero's Madonna della Misericordia of 1445-62, now in the Galleria at San Sepolcro.

11 June 1445.

Pietro di Luca, Prior. . . . [and seven others] in the behalf and name of the Fraternity and Members of S. Maria della Misericordia have committed to Piero di Benedetto, painter, the making and painting of a panel in the oratory and church of the said Fraternity, of the same form as the panel which is there now, with all the material for it and all the costs and expenses of the complete furnishing and preparation of its painting assembly and erection in the said oratory: with those images figures and ornaments stated and agreed with the abovesaid Prior and advisor or their successors in office and with the other abovesaid officers of the Fraternity, to be gilded with fine gold and coloured with fine colours, and specially with ultramarine blue: with this condition, that the said Piero should be bound to make good any defect the said panel shall develop or show with the passing of time through failure of material or of Piero himself, up to a limit of ten years. For all this they have agreed to pay 150 florins, at the rate of five lire five soldi the florin. Of which they have undertaken to give him on demand fifty florins now and the balance when the panel is finished. And the said Piero has undertaken to make paint decorate and assemble the said panel in the same breadth height and shape as the wooden panel there at present, and to deliver it complete assembled and set in place within the next three years; and that *no painter may put his hand to the brush other than Piero himself*.

A Contract between Filippino Lippi and Filippo Strozzi

This is the contract for Lippi's paintings in the Strozzi Chapel in S Maria Novella in Florence. It was signed on 21 April 1487.

Let it be known to all that the painter Filippo di Filippo is engaged by Filippo di Matteo degli Strozzi to paint his chapel in S Maria Novella next to the high altar. In the vault there shall be four figures, either Doctors of the Church, Evangelists or others according to the choice of the said Strozzi, and they shall be painted with blue and with gold as richly as possible. The rest of the vault shall be of fine ultramarine blue worth at least 4 large gold florins an ounce, and the ribs of the vault, capitals of the pilasters and cornices shall be adorned with as much gold as is necessary. On each side wall there shall be two narrative scenes of subjects to be determined by the said Filippo Strozzi, and the window wall and the pilasters and the arch inside and out shall be adorned as the said Filippo Strozzi requires, and the dado similarly as Filippo Strozzi orders, and in every place where it is needed gold, pure gold and every other fine and perfect color shall be used. And the said Filippo di Filippo promises the said Strozzi to work in fresco according to the practice of good masters, and with all possible diligence, and all by his own hand, especially, the figures. And it is agreed that the said Filippo di Filippo shall have for the work, that is to say the painting, colors including blue pigment, scaffolding, lime [for plaster] and all else so that the said Strozzi will be required to meet no other expenses, that is to say 300 minted gold florins payable as to 35 at the beginning for wooden scaffolding, lime and other necessities, up to 100 florins when he wants to go to Venice and the rest by installments according to the progress of the work . . . , which he promises to complete by 1 March 1490.

A Contract between Matteo di Giovanni and his German Patrons

Anno Domini 1478, November 30. Antonio da Spezia and Peter Paul of Germany, bakers, inhabitants of the city of Siena, in the street of the Maidens, administrators, as they affirm, elected and deputed for the purpose mentioned below by the Society of St. Barbara [patron saint of Germans] which meets in the church of San Domenico in Siena, for the purpose of renting the meeting room and for the work on the painting, in their own personal names ordered and commissioned Matteo di Giovanni, painter of Siena, here present, to make and paint with his own hand an altarpiece for the chapel of St. Barbara already mentioned, situated in the church of San Domenico, with such figures, height and width, and agreements, manners, and arrangements and length of time noted below, and described in the common language. [The text changes here from Latin to Italian.]

First, the said panel is to be as rich and as big, and as large in each dimension, as the panel that Jacopo di Mariano Borghesi had made, at the altar of the third of the new chapels on the right in San Domenico aforesaid, as one goes toward the high altar. With this addition, that the lunette above the said altarpiece must be at least one-quarter higher than the one the said Jacopo had made. Item, in the middle of the aforementioned panel the figure of St. Barbara is to be painted, sitting in a golden chair and dressed in a robe of crimson brocade. Item, in the said panel shall be painted two angels flying, showing that they are holding the crown over the head of St. Barbara. Item, on one side of St. Barbara, that is on the right, should be painted the figure of St. Catherine the German [sic; St. Catherine of Alexandria is represented] and on the left the figure of St. Mary Magdalene. Item, in the lunette of the said panel there should be and is to be represented the story of the three Magi, who come from three different roads, and at the end of the three roads these Magi meet together, and go to offer at the Nativity, with the understanding that the Nativity is to be represented with the Virgin Mary, and her Son, Joseph, the ox and the ass, the way it is customary to do this Nativity. Item, that in the columns of the said panel are to be painted four saints per column, who will be named to the said master Matteo. Item, that in the middle of the predella is to be painted a crucified Christ with the figure of our Lady on one side and St. John on the other, and on either side of this Crucified are to be painted two stories of St. Barbara, and at the foot of the columns of the predella two coats of arms, one on each column, as will be explained to

master Matteo. Item, that the said master Matteo has to have this panel of wood made to the measurements mentioned, at his own expense, and have it painted and adorned with fine gold, and with all the colors, richly, according to the judgment of every good master, like the one of Jacopo Borghesi, and have it set on the altar at his own expense, in eight months from now, without any variance.

[Latin resumes] And all these things for the price of ninety florins, at four pounds the florin, in Sienese money, to be paid to the said master Matteo in this way and at these times, to wit, 25 florins at the present time, another 25 florins at Easter next, 20 florins on the feast of the Holy Ghost next, and the balance, to wit another 20 florins, at the end of the time, and when the said master has completed the painting in every degree of finish, and placed it on the said altar. Done at Siena, in the hall of the notaries' guild, in the presence of [two] bakers of Germany, inhabitants of Siena, witnesses. After which, in the same place, Master John son of the late Frederick, of Germany, at present cook of our lords the Lords of Siena, and Master John son of the late George of Germany, embroiderer, and inhabitant of Siena, promised the said master Matteo to guarantee that the said clients paid the said sums.

The Painter Francesco del Cossa Requests Better Pay from the Duke of Ferrara

Most illustrious Prince and Excellent Lord my most particular Lord: I recently petitioned your lordship along with the other painters about the payment for the room at Schifanoia, to which your lordship answered that the account was persistent. Illustrious prince, I do not wish to be the one to annoy Pellegrino de Prisciano and others, and so I have made up my mind to turn to your lordship alone, because you may feel, or it may have been said to you, that there are some who can be happy or are overpaid with a wage of ten pennies. And to recall my petition to you, I am Francesco del Cossa, who have made by myself the three wall sections toward the anteroom. And so, illustrious lord, if your lordship wished to give me no more than ten pennies per foot, and even though I would lose forty to fifty ducats, since I have to live by my hands all the time, I would be happy and well set, but since there are other circumstances, it makes me feel pain and grief within me. Especially considering that I, when after all I have begun to have a little of a name, should be treated and judged and compared to the sorriest assistant in Ferrara. And that my having studied, and I study all the time, should not at this point have a little more reward, and especially from your lordship, than a person gets who had avoided such study. Surely, illustrious lord, it could not be that I would not feel grief and pain. And because my work proves what I have done, and I have used gold and good colors, if they were of the same value as those who have gone ahead without such labors it would seem strange to me, and I say this, lord, because I have done almost the whole work in fresco, which is a complex and good type of work, and this is known to all the masters of the art. All the same, illustrious lord, I put myself at your lordship's feet, and I pray you, if your objection should be to say: I don't want to do it for thee because I would have to do it for the others, my lord, your lordship could always say that the appraisals were this way. And if your lordship doesn't want to follow the appraisals, I pray your lordship may wish to give me, if not all that I perhaps would be entitled to, then whatever part you may feel in your grace and kindness, and I will accept it as a gracious gift, and will so proclaim it. My compliments to your illustrious lordship. Ferrara, March 25, 1470.

[Annotated by the Duke:] Let him be content with the fee that was set, for it was set for those chosen for the individual fields.