Invention and Authorship in Early Modern Italian Visual Culture

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In 1453, a very young Andrea Mantegna was commissioned to paint a fresco of the Assumption of the Virgin over the altar of a family chapel (Figure 1). Mantegna tried to make the most of an unpromisingly narrow slot of space for what was typically a more stable, triangular composition. Usually, Renaissance viewers imagining the immaculate Virgin, rising whole into heaven after her death as proof of her physical purity, saw her at the apex of a triangle, the base of which was made up of a grouping of the twelve Apostles of Christ. An artist would typically parcel out among the twelve men those postures and gestures that most clearly displayed the community's grief at the Virgin's death, and its astonishment at the miracle that the Apostles, and we, were witnessing. Mantegna dealt with the narrow panel of wall by painting a fictive architectural frame around the scene, through which we see the Virgin rising, as if about to disappear from view by vanishing behind the arch itself. Below, eight Apostles crowd the small amount of space, one of them supporting himself on the frame of the painted arch as he cranes his neck to see the Virgin's disappearance into heaven. In 1457, when Mantegna declared the painting finished, the patron was not happy; in fact, she brought suit against Mantegna, who had only provided two-thirds the requisite number of Apostles. Because it was customary at that time in Padua for painters to charge for their work by the number of figures, she did not feel she should have to pay the full price. The associated matter of historical correctness, that is, the fact that twelve Apostles were said to have been present at the event, was less easily stated as an economic complaint. Following guild practice in the case of disputes, two experienced master painters were asked to judge the work. The first master was asked by the counsel how many Apostles there had

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1. RONALD LIGHTBOWN, MANTEGNA 52 (1986).
2. Id.
**Figure 1**

Andrea Mantegna, *Assumption of the Virgin*, fresco, 1453-57, Church of the Eremitani, Padua, Italy, ©Alinari/Art Resource, NY
actually been, and he admitted that there were twelve. However, he said, in his judgment Mantegna was working with a small enough space to justify not showing all of them, and the eight he had done had been made so well that he might be paid as if he had done twelve. Such a judgment privileged Mantegna's skill in representation over the usual quantitative method of charging. The second master disagreed, but allowed that if all twelve Apostles were included they would have had to have been much smaller.

Although visual art today is considered to be, first and foremost, a vehicle of self-expression, in the fifteenth century it was not. Art was functional and utilitarian; it was generally devotional, didactic, or decorative, and preferably all three. The artist's work was not self-expressive in the sense that we value individual self-expression and originality today; authorship accrued to different aspects of creation in the pre-modern period. This Article is about what share the Renaissance author was considered to have in the creation of a visual work, who the authors of visual works were considered to be, how they made their authorship known, and to what ends.

Mantegna's fresco painting of the Assumption had a particular, well-understood function. As an altarpiece, it was a devotional aid meant above anything else to inspire feelings of devotion in worshippers and to make religious events, particularly miracles, real and memorable through clear and vibrant pictorial means. Beauty in coloring, decorative effects, gold leaf, gesturing figures, and genre detail all worked toward that end. Contracts, such as the one Madonna Ovetari had made with Mantegna, exerted artistic control that protected both the artist, whose job it was to employ those effects in a pleasing way, and the patron, who had a good idea what was wanted, but was not always able to express it clearly. The best contracts were specific, including penalties for late work, identifying which part of the painting must be painted by the master and which parts might be relegated to apprentices, and whether the artist or patron would pay for the materials. A knowledgeable patron was able to be much more specific than one who knew little about, for example, making certain that the artist used the best colors and materials to ensure a lasting product.

It was even more difficult to make sure that the finished product was going to look as it was expected to, which was the problem in the

5. Id. at 1-27 (discussing the shift in artists' contracts towards privileging the artist's skill over cost of materials in the fifteenth century).
case of Mantegna’s *Assumption*. The most certain process was for the patron and artist to register a drawing with a notary that reflected as accurately as possible the intent of both the artist and patron.\(^6\) There are many drawings in Renaissance notarial archives, signed by their makers, for which the signature means something quite different from the meanings we are used to understanding in signatures at the bottom of artists’ drawings. One typical example records a design by a Roman paper-flower maker named Marco di Giuglielmo for decorating the basilica of St. Peter’s in Rome with paper flowers on certain important feast days. The drawing, clearly executed in black ink on white paper, shows a doorway and a pediment festooned with garlands draped in a particular way and arranged around the architecture according to the plan that all parties had approved. The text of the agreement between Marco and the canons of St. Peter’s, signed by all parties, says that Marco will “do the three doors of the staircase according to the drawing given here.”\(^7\) The drawing of the scheme for the decoration is appended to the document, and bears the following promise in the craftsman’s own handwriting, with his signature: “I, Marco di Giuglielmo, am obliged and promise on the Feast Day of St. Peter to make garlands for the three doors of the staircase according to the present drawing and to do this for the next three years according to the agreement made . . . and signed by my hand.”\(^8\) The two pages of written text accompanying the drawing specify the materials to be used, the prices to paid, that the materials be of good quality, the dates of delivery, and that Marco will keep and maintain the decorations in good condition in between holidays at his own expense.\(^9\) His signature at the bottom of the drawing was his legal promise that the paper flowers he would provide would be arranged according to the design that both parties had seen and approved, and the drawing was registered with a notary. In this, it was a perfectly standard, orderly and complete contract designed to promote the maximum degree of communication and avoid misunderstandings.

The paper flowers are a bit of ephemera, and until more research is done on the history of festival decorations for the church we have to

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7. Archivio di Stato di Roma, 30 Notai Capitolini, off. 9 (Quintilius Garganus), vol. 8, c. 342r-343r. (agreement between Marco di Giuglielmo, Romano, and the canons of St. Peter’s, 24 May 1590).

8. *Id.*

9. *Id.* Although the drawing specifies the design of the decoration for the doors only, the text mentions that other parts of the church will be decorated as well and gives specific requirements for the number of flowers to be used for each garland, although there is no accompanying drawing for these decorations, or of the high altar and other areas.
have faith that the flower maker fulfilled his task as planned. Much of the commissioned work that painters and sculptors produced in the fifteenth and even in the sixteenth centuries was controlled in similar ways. Had Mantegna’s patron first approved a drawing of what he planned to do, she would not have been able to complain about the shortfall of Apostles. It simply never occurred to her, a patron who had probably seen a fair number of paintings of the Assumption of the Virgin, that anyone would try to cheat her in the way she felt Mantegna was doing. Mantegna’s original invention, which used the very stylish new conventions of single point perspective in an ostentatious way to overcome the restrictive space of the narrow wall, represented a suggestive crowd that seemed about to tumble out of the slender painting into the chapel itself. He had reason to hope that this ingenious idea would be valued over pedestrian number crunching, or Apostle counting. A few years after he completed this chapel, Mantegna gave up painting for merchants and went to work for the court of Mantua, where he felt his ingenuity would be valued, and that he would have more artistic control.10

The artist’s idea, or invention, was one cause of the completed work looking the way it did, the patron who wished for the work and who paid for it, and who, as we have seen, usually had a good idea of what the work should look like, was of course another. As Michael Baxandall best described it, “The renaissance sense of who was responsible for works of art and their quality is agile and elusive: renaissance observers can glide between a sense of the patron as author and a sense of the artist as author in a way that is hard to follow.”11 We get a sense of this in our understanding of what the words “Marcus Agrippa Fecit” means, inscribed over the Pantheon in Rome. We are not to understand that it was the Emperor Marcus Agrippa who actually built the Pantheon, but that it was he who had once caused it to be built.12 By the same token, the Coronation of the Virgin painted for the high altar of the church of Sant’Ambrogio in Florence, and known as the Maringhi Coronation (Figure 2), was not painted by


12. Although the present surviving building was constructed during the later reign of the Emperor Hadrian (118-125 C.E.), the inscription refers to an earlier temple first built on that spot during the reign of Agrippa (27 B.C.E.). Adriano Agnati, Roma 387-88 (8th ed. 1992). However, the funding and conception of this altarpiece was Maringhi’s pious work.
Francesco Maringhi. Maringhi was the original patron of the work, although he died several years before the painter Fra Filippo Lippi had finished the altarpiece. Thus, in front of the patron’s portrait we see the phrase “Is perfecit opus” (“He brought about this work”) inscribed on a banderole proffered by an angel.13 The painter, Lippi, was a Carmelite monk; tradition has it that he has included an image of himself in the painting directly across the stage from Maringhi the patron. He shows himself as the person who, thoughtfully leaning his head on his hand, looks out at the brilliantly colored narrative that he visualized both for Maringhi and for us. There is no other signature on the painting, although the circumstances of its creation are exceptionally well-documented by surviving payment records. The chapel in which the painting was to hang was also Maringhi’s burial chapel, and it was surely his vision of heaven that we were intended to understand. Lippi’s authorship is in the act of making Maringhi’s piety and the Virgin’s glory visible for all of us so that we, like Maringhi, can

believe in one of the more abstract tenets of church doctrine. Lippi's self-portrait, here, becomes his signature; by signing with a visual effect, he signs it in kind, as it were.

Later in his career, when Mantegna had stopped working for Paduan merchants and became the court painter for the Gonzaga, the ruling family of Mantua, he approached the matter of a signature in a similar way, but in a decorative rather than devotional context. His first major commission for the Gonzaga castle in Mantua was a fresco painted in a small bedroom and audience hall known as the Camera Picta. The imagery showed, among other things, the whole princely family gathered together in two different scenes mediated by panels of antique grotesque decoration. Mantegna created a pack of angelic boys to hold up a gold placard with the message in formal, lapidary Latin addressed to his patrons, in which he hoped that they would accept opus hoc tene—which is a pun, as the adjective tenuis could make the phrase mean one of two things: on the one hand, "this slight or meager work," or else "this extraordinarily delicate, subtle or refined work." Another signature appeared in the small piece of paper held in the hand of a young Gonzaga cardinal, inscribed with the now illegible phrase, "Andrea me pinxit," or "Andrea painted me." Most unusually, Mantegna also included his portrait on the wall, as a fantastic element of the decorative panel separating the large golden tabula from the scene containing the cardinal. The tiny signature head, at once jokey and discreet, shows the court decorator peeping out amidst the grotesque decoration so that the painter's face, his name, and the work of his hand are all present in the fresco. When Mantegna was apprenticed to a painting teacher as a young boy, his teacher adopted him, as well as some of his other best pupils. The young artist took his teacher's name, only returning to his own birth name after he sued his adoptive father to dissolve the relationship. Although the documents for this suit do not seem to have survived, similar papers filed by another student claim that the reason for the emancipation was to be able to paint under his own name.

Working at court carried certain privileges, among them was exemption from having to belong to the city guilds, as most painters, goldsmiths, and sculptors had to do. The first work a guild artist

16. LINCOLN, supra note 10, at 24-26; LIGHTBOWN, supra note 1, at 21. For a discussion of workshop organization in general, see THOMAS, supra note 3, at 149-81, 213-55.
would be allowed to sign with his own name would be one that proved that the artist knew how to compose and execute a work properly in a certain genre. A painter would have had to show technical facility in the genre: the successful application of gold leaf, for example, or the preparation and mixing of colors, but also the grace with which he handled the composition of one of the several well-known and popular subjects that comprised the market for Renaissance paintings. If his painting was judged worthy then the painter would be raised to the status of a master in the guild, meaning he could run his own workshop under his name and hire apprentices to work under him and paint in his style. This painting was therefore submitted to the guild as the painter's *master piece*, the work with which he attained the rank of master, and it is from this old convention that we get our much less meaningful word.

When Renaissance people looked at paintings they effortlessly took in information available to them that we, today, have to struggle to reconstruct: an altarpiece helped them to pray, it was an object of civic pride in an important local church, it may have been made by someone known to them, and this information would co-exist in their minds with memories of other, earlier altarpieces they had seen. The differences between one painter's image of the Virgin and those of others—the use of focused light, for example, or of stocky, corporeal bodies, rather than wispy, ethereal ones, of a particularly graceful pose, or pleasing combination of figures or accessories—would define that artist's intervention in and contribution to the project of altarpiece painting, that aspect of painting, or of conceiving a work that was first, or uniquely, his. This is not, strictly speaking, self-expression, at least not the way we talk about it today in creative writing or visual art. In the Renaissance, this kind of contribution came to be expressed as *invention*, a word that comes from ancient classification of the parts of rhetoric.

Invention, in rhetoric, was the core of an argument, ornament was that part of the argument that made invention memorable and persuasive. When pictorial printmaking was developed and came into general use in the late fifteenth century, the word "invention" took on more particular meaning in the visual arts. In printmaking, it came to signify the part of the printed image that formed its central subject or

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17. *Baxandall*, supra note 4. at 45.
idea. For example, the print in Figure 3 made known to the public Michelangelo’s statue of Moses, which was in reality just one part of the sculptural program of the large wall tomb of Pope Julius II, installed in the Roman church of San Pietro in Vincoli. The inscription on the print says that it portrays “the marble likeness of the great Moses from the tomb of Julius II on the Esquiline Hill, imagined by the hand of Michelangelo.” The shadow behind the statue, the composition in the rectangular image, point of view, decisions about cropping, the decorative framing of the ornamental grotesque panels to each side of the figure as well as the engraving and perhaps the drawing of the statue itself, are all the work of an artist whose name appears nowhere on the image, and so is unknown to us today. The invention, Moses as a hugely muscular, enthroned, magisterial prophet, was Michelangelo’s.

The increasing use of the printing press for both textual and pictorial printing over the course of the sixteenth century went hand-in-hand with changes in ideas about how and for what reasons to express authorship. When the painter Mantegna went to work for the court at Mantua, he was forbidden to work for other patrons. He became one of the first artists to have his ambitious inventions printed to magnify his fame by providing a means of distributing his imagery outside the city where he lived. It may also have been, perhaps, important that the prints provided a way to make extra money, for the court was not good about paying him on time. Mantegna is one of the better documented artists of the late fifteenth century, but until very recently almost nothing was known for certain about his printmaking practice or even the role he played in the making of his very famous engravings. Documents found only in the last five years have shown how Mantegna, an extraordinarily busy artist who had been trained as a painter, took advantage of the presence of skilled jewelers and metalworkers in Mantua to help him with the laborious task of engraving his images onto copper plates for printing. He had his drawings engraved and printed by a young goldsmith who had also been charged

19. A practical definition of invention in terms of prints is given succinctly by Michael Bury as “the design or . . . the underlying visual idea of the print, or a key element of it.” MICHAEL BURY, THE PRINT IN ITALY: 1550-1620, at 8 (2001).
20. LIGHTBOWN, supra note 1, at 82.
21. Andrea Canova, Gian Marco Cavalli incisore per Andrea Mantegna e altre notizie sull’oreficeria e la tipografia a Mantova nel XV secolo, in ITALIA MEDIOEVALE E UMANISTICA XLII 149-79 (2001). The document detailing the relationship between Mantegna and the goldsmith is transcribed id. at 149-51. The publication of this contract should settle the question, which has raged among art historians for the last century, over whether or not Mantegna engraved his own plates.
Figure 3
Anonymous engraving from the Roman workshop of Antonio Salamanca, *Moses*, after Michelangelo, © Biblioteca Angelica, Rome, by permission of the Ministero per I Beni Culturali e Ambientali
by the Gonzaga with manufacturing luxurious vases and related items after Mantegna’s designs. This kind of designing, for what we now patronizingly call the decorative arts, was an important part of a court artist’s duties and nothing Mantegna could avoid. However, in order to execute the patterns their skillful painter made up, the Gonzaga were careful to attract the most able workers in fine metals. It was a great part of Mantegna’s genius that he recognized the pictorial possibilities of combining his drawing skills with the engraving skills of goldsmiths at a time when most printmakers were either accomplished in drawing or skilled in engraving metal, but were not usually equally trained in both of these very different arts.

Mantegna maintained a professional relationship with the goldsmith Gian Marco Cavalli for the next thirty years; the goldsmith’s signature appears among the witnesses to Mantegna’s will. Although Cavalli must have eventually earned Mantegna’s trust, at least in the beginning the painter was unusually careful about overseeing the printing of his designs. In the contract he drew up with the goldsmith, Mantegna specified that no one should have access to the proofs, plates, or drawings except himself and the goldsmith, without his written permission. In this way, he was exerting strong control over his imagery without necessarily having to master, or carry through, the engraving process itself. We know from a post-mortem inventory of the belongings of one of Mantegna’s sons that the engraved copper plates—the matrices for making the prints—were in the possession of Mantegna, and not Cavalli. Therefore, not only final approval of the engraved image, but also of the number of prints to be issued, was mandated by the artist and not by an intermediary publisher, nor by the printer. None of Mantegna’s engravings bears any signature or monogram whatsoever, although his style and imagery were unique and well-known, and no one doubts that the images from which the engravings

23. See Canova, supra note 21, at 150, which states:

item che promette esso Zohanne marcho a dicto messer Andrea stipulante per se et suorum [sic] heredes non monstrare detti designi et stampi né lassare retrar essi designi a persona alcuna senza licentia de dicto messer Andrea sotto pena de ducati cento . . .
et, se pur achadesse de mostrarlri, et habia scrito di propria mano de esso messer Andrea le persone a cui vorà mostrare, li sia licio tunc mostrarlri . . .

Id. Cavalli also promised not to print, sell, or give away any impressions from the plates without Mantegna’s permission.
24. For the document of the inventory, see Rodolfo Signorini, New Findings about Andrea Mantegna: His Son Ludovico’s Post-Mortem Inventory (1510). 59 J. Warburg & Courtauld Inst. 103, 103-18 (1996). See also Canova, supra note 21, at 168-69 (discussing the fact that the plates remained in the control and possession of Mantegna in the light of the contract with Cavalli to engrave the plates, and in terms of issues of the artist’s control).
were made were designed by him. This contract is the first recorded instance in printmaking of the division of labor between the inventor and the executor of the printed image.25

Albrecht Dürer, the famous German printer and painter who, unlike Mantegna, had been trained both as a goldsmith and a painterly draughtsman, had access to some of Mantegna’s prints. At some point he made carefully drawn copies of them; prints offered an opportunity for artists to learn, through copying, from masters other than their own.26 The information the print carried for Dürer had to do with learning about the antique imagery for which Mantegna had become famous. He did not copy Mantegna’s rather unique drawing style seen in the engravings, with their straight hatching lines that were as much of a signature as Mantegna’s name would have been. Dürer copied the figures and composition of Mantegna’s print using a curving line with cross-hatching that was his own natural visual handwriting. The drawing style was not what he was looking to acquire from Mantegna’s invention.27

As a young man, Dürer produced an almost immediately famous set of woodblock prints of the Life of the Virgin. His prints were sold at fairs and in bookshops in Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy, and they became quickly well-known. It was not unusual, from the very beginning, for artists to make copies of other artist’s prints and sell them.28 What was unusual about the activity of a young printer from Bologna named Marcantonio Raimondi was that in his engraved copies of Dürer’s woodcuts he included Dürer’s signature, a monogram made from the gothic letters “AD” (Figures 4 & 5). We would today think it very understandable that this might upset Dürer, and as far as we know, it did. Giorgio Vasari gave what is probably a highly dramatized version of events. According to Vasari, Dürer, on finding out that Marcantonio was engraving his compositions, became so angry that he traveled to Venice and appealed to the Venetian government to put a stop to the forgeries. The dates Vasari gives do not make this precise version of events probable, but some version of the story must have occurred because in about 1506 and in the middle of the series, Marcantonio stopped using Dürer’s distinctive monogram at the bot-

25. Canova, supra note 21, at 178.
FIGURE 4
Albrecht Dürer, *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*,
woodcut from *The Life of the Virgin*, ca. 1503,
© 2003 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,
Maria Antoinette Evans Fund, 30.1158
Marcantonio Raimondi, *Presentation of the Young Virgin in the Temple*, engraving after Dürer, © Courtesy of the Fogg Museum, Harvard University Art Museums, Gray Collection of Engravings Fund, G4808
tom of the engravings and substituted the empty plaquette that be-
came one of his signatures for a long time thereafter. While there is
much evidence among Dürer's correspondence and in the wording of
the privileges he obtained for his work to suggest that he was dis-
pleased with copyists who published his images on their own, there is
no surviving legal record of the interaction between the Venetian Sen-
ate and Dürer in the case of Marcantonio's copying. The fact that
Marcantonio continued to produce engravings in the series, minus the
offending monogram, shows that he was evidently permitted to copy
Dürer's inventions, even without any notice giving credit to that artist,
as long as Dürer's monogram was not affixed to an image he himself
did not engrave.

It is not that Dürer was above copying and selling other artist's in-
ventions. Unusually, Dürer did not sign this woodcut print of a knot
(Figure 6). The print he copied it from is one of a set of six fantastic
knots by an unknown engraver, all the same size, that attribute them-
selves to an otherwise unknown Academy of Leonardo da Vinci (Fig-
ure 7). In other words, they purport to be related to an informal
group of people that either studied with or studied the ideas and
works of Leonardo. Following time-honored Renaissance practice,
the very sort of practice that made it possible for Marcantonio to con-
tinue to produce images of The Life of the Virgin, Dürer omitted any
attribution or connection to Leonardo in his woodcut. While he did
not overtly claim the invention for his own, no other alternative is
offered. The difference between making a drawn copy of the knot and
a printed one is primarily commercial. Like most printmakers, Dürer
thought of his prints as commercial, actually paying for goods and ser-
vices with them and using them like money. Probably like Mantegna,
he enjoyed the way they freed him from the demands of working for a
patron. Ornament prints, such as the knots, exhibit a kind of im-

29. For Marcantonio's engravings and one interpretation of Vasari's story, see Innis H. Shoe-
maker & Elizabeth Broun, The Engravings of Marcantonio Raimondi 62 (1981). Vasari's story is recounted in Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori, in Le opera
di Giorgio Vasari 405-06 (G. Milanesi ed., 1981). The role of legal intervention in regulating
the production and protection of artist's images and fashioning ideas about plagiarism, especially
in regard to Dürer and Marcantonio, are discussed more fully in Lisa Pon, Prints and Privileges:
Regulating the Image in 16th-Century Italy. Harvard Art Museum Bull., Fall 1998, at 41. The
importance and significance of Dürer's monogram is discussed in Pamela O. Long, Openness,
Secrecy, Authorship: Technical, Arts and the Culture of Knowledge from Antiquity to the Renais-
30. Pon, supra note 29, at 53.
31. Id. at 52-53 (discussing the traditional lack of regulation and attribution of invention in
copying paintings and sculpture). See also Bury, supra note 19, at 75-78.
32. See Long, supra note 29, at 216-22.
Albrecht Dürer, *Design for Embroidery with Seven Hexagonal Stars*, ca. 1507, © Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, photography by Erik Gould
Figure 7
agery that was distinctly decorative although any ornament could be used to make a devotional image more beautiful or memorable. Ornament prints had their own market, and almost their own sense of authorship, at once more defined and more practical than the authorship of devotional images or other narrative scenes.

The Leonardo-associated knot is an unusually elaborate example of an ornament print. Ornament prints were among those designs that were most often securely attributed to the inventive mind of a single artist and engraver. Once published, they provided goldsmiths and jewelers with sources of ready income as they were easily copied by any skilled artisan (painters, embroiderers, metalworkers, etc.) onto any surface. In a strange printed self-portrait by a very prolific producer of ornament prints, the German engraver Virgil Solis portrayed himself seated at a table in the seemingly ignoble act of engraving a set of playing cards, his craftsman’s monogram hovering in the background above his head. There are many other examples of signed ornament prints that include such practical designs as intricately rendered sets of spoons such as those in Figure 8 by the German en-

![Image of Two Spoons and Utensil with Knife, Ear Spoons, etc., engraving, 1539.](image)

**Figure 8**

Heinrich Aldegrever, *Two Spoons and Utensil with Knife, Ear Spoons, etc.*, engraving, 1539, © Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Museum Works of Art Fund, photography by Erik Gould
graver Heinrich Aldegrever, a small, stunningly quiet still life in itself, but also, and more profitably for the publisher, a suggestive and informational pattern useful for craftsmen. Aldegrever was also a painter, capable of producing narrative scenes and figures, and he made prints of religious images as well. It was not unusual for artists, especially Northern artists, who made ambitious narratives to include among their printed works several ostentatiously signed examples of ornament prints. Dürer, Lucas van Leyden, and Martin Schongauer are among early examples of this mixing of genres, in part because so many of the earliest pictorial engravers were originally trained to draw and engrave in the capacity of goldsmiths.

While many of the more prestigious narrative or devotional scenes a printmaker might engrave would have been designed originally by another artist and would have originally appeared in another medium (such as Michelangelo's marble Moses), Aldegrever can be securely considered the author of his spoons, both in terms of their invention and in the execution of the print. These ornament prints were in fact the largest group of prints to be engraved by the hand of the same person who was responsible for their invention. Adam von Bartsch, an eighteenth-century print connoisseur, made a catalogue of all the early prints he knew about and felt were worthy of cataloguing. He called his catalogue Le Peintre graveur, or The Painter Engraver, because his ideal of a printing artist was someone like Dürer, who at least at the beginning of his career engraved his own plates and also made drawings. The ornament printers were, by this definition, peintre graveurs (they drew, although few of them also painted much), but ornament ranked lowest in the possible hierarchy of artistic genres.

It seems at first strange, therefore, that someone like Solis, who made designs not only for playing cards but also for the decoration of armor and guns, would choose to immortalize himself in an activity of such low status. However, this kind of work provided a lucrative living, and a popular engraved plate guaranteed its owner money every time a print was pulled from it. Unlike type for a book, which needed to be dismantled and the letters used again for each page as it was printed, it was easy to strike a print from a plate anytime it was needed. As Mantegna knew when he insisted on the ownership of his

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33. On ornament prints in this period, see Michael Snodin & Maurice Howard, Ornament: A Social History Since 1450, at 18-61 (1996).
34. For drawing in a goldsmith's shop, see Patricia Lee Rubin & Alison Wright, Renaissance Florence: The Art of the 1470s, at 78-120, 150-51, 224-25 (1999).
engraved plates, possession of a plate was like money in the bank; much of what we know about Renaissance printing comes from legal suits over stolen plates.  

Dürer, Solis, Aldegrever, van Leyden, and Marcantonio (when he did not use the empty plaquette) all signed their prints with a monogram made up of their initials. The convention of signing prints with a monogram comes from a craft tradition and has more to do with the guarantees a guild member could make about his work than those we think of today as an artist making about his or her work. The “AD” monogram signature that Marcantonio copied is a different kind of guarantee from any that you find on a fine art print today. Today the artist—who is rarely also the printer—signs each impression from the printed edition in pencil so that the consumer is made to feel that the signing artist actually approved the finished print, and even numbered it to insure that the edition was limited to the number of prints that could be pulled while the printing matrix remained in good shape.

Signed prints in the Renaissance included the monogram or other convention of attributing authorship in the image block, or plate, and this was the case with every Renaissance print that included an attribution; individual prints were not signed by hand. Anyone who owned the printing matrix would be printing the signature along with the picture. It was also easy and commonly done to scrape one attribution from the surface of the plate and re-engrave a different one in its place. This usually occurred when a plate came into the possession of a different publisher, although some publishers simply added their names to those of previous publishers at the bottom of the plate. By today’s standards, this would make a signature meaningless, as we feel the signature guarantees the artist’s attention to and approval of—authority over—each individual impression. Dürer’s monogram was a guarantee that the particular visualization of a moment from the life of the Virgin was his own, but it also meant that the masterful cutting and articulation, or crafting, of the figures and the detailed background and genre scenes were also his own. This last aspect of visual information was changed in Marcantonio’s (for the most part) faithful engraved copies of Dürer’s woodcut, and this is one of the several reasons why an artist would be upset about the pirating of his images. It was a question of craft, something traditionally and strongly pro-

36. See Bury, supra note 19, at 78.
37. This convention was recently the subject of scandal when it was discovered that the work of Salvador Dali and other popular twentieth-century artists were being printed onto presigned sheets of paper. See generally Lee Catterall, The Great Dali Art Fraud and Other Deceptions (1992).
ected in the kind of thinking about authorship that sprang from guild practice. The invention could be copied without much recourse.\(^\text{38}\)

Printing, with its potential for the quick and anonymous production of multiples, brought the manner of publishing visual information under pressure more than ever in a culture that relied on copying both for learning, and for the acquisition of fame. A painter and wood-block cutter named Ugo da Carpi developed a method of printing using tone blocks, something he called “chiaro, et scuro,” or light and dark. We today call these chiaroscuro prints. What Ugo invented was an idea about printing in which the image was divided into areas of light and dark, so that when three or four tone blocks were printed together with the lightest lights being provided by the color of the paper, they made a shadowy, suggestive picture that looked like an ink drawing. No one block would look like a complete image printed by itself. Ugo patented this process in a petition to the Venetian Senate in 1516: “[I have] found a new way to print chiaro et scuro, a new thing and never before done, it is beautiful, and useful to many who take pleasure in drawing.”\(^\text{39}\) Although Ugo protected his way of printing chiaroscuro, he could not protect the images themselves, which were not his invention. The print in Figure 9 was an invention of Raphael’s, as Ugo proclaims in Latin at the bottom of one of his prints: “Raphael of Urbino. Whoever will print these images without the permission of the author will incur the excommunication of Pope Leo X and other penalties of the Venetian Senate. Printed in Rome at Ugo da Carpi’s 1518.”\(^\text{40}\)

Ugo’s print was indirectly made from a design by Raphael for a very expensive set of tapestries for the Sistine Chapel depicting the Acts of the Apostles Peter and Paul. There are many interesting things going on here that recast our conception of Renaissance ideas about authorship. First, Ugo copied the image for his print not from Raphael’s life-size cartoon, but from an engraving by Agostino Veneziano, a member of the workshop of Marcantonio, who, like Ugo, had moved from Venice to Rome.\(^\text{41}\) Marcantonio had been hired by Raphael to engrave images from Raphael’s workshop drawings onto copper plates, which would be printed and put up for sale by

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\(^{39}\) Ugo’s privilege is transcribed in Jan Johnson. Ugo da Carpi’s Chiaroscuro Woodcuts. 57-58 Print Collector 2. 12 n.1 (1982). See also Lincoln, supra note 10, at 75-80.

\(^{40}\) Johnson, supra note 39, at 63-67.

\(^{41}\) Id. at 64.
another member of the workshop. The landscape out the window, the figures on the stairs, and the pavement are more closely related to the engraving than to the cartoon.

Second, the tapestries themselves were woven in Belgium, from Raphael’s cartoons, in a workshop known for the quality of its weaving as well as of its gold and silver thread, and colorfast dyes. The weavers also knew how to work closely from an artist’s design, and with their colored yarns and precious metallic threads they produced miraculous effects such as reflections in water, the luster of expensive fabrics, the gleam of haloes and even atmospheric effects of air, light, and shadow. The weavers were guild men, and they had to weave their shop marks into the borders of the tapestries so that there could be no easy counterfeit—it could not be stamped on, but was instead woven into the fabric, as an inherent guarantee of its authenticity. This kind of thinking was behind the impetus to engrave the artist’s monogram into the plates from which prints were pulled. While anyone could sign a piece of paper, the monogram worked into the matrix

42. Milanesi, supra note 29; Shoemaker & Broun, supra note 29.
43. For the tapestry cartoons, see John Shearman, Raphael’s Cartoons in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen, and the Tapestries for the Sistine Chapel (1972).
of the print seemed to be an inviolable guarantee of authenticity until Marcantonio produced it as part of his copy. The nature of Marcantonio’s bad judgment in assuming another man’s monogram, as perceived in sixteenth-century terms, should now be more clear.

The third point is the question of Raphael’s workshop practice, and the meaning of his name as the author of any image. When we say that the tapestries were made from Raphael’s cartoons (there is no signature or attribution of authorship of any kind on the tapestries, other than the craftsman’s mark), we mean that they were made from designs he authorized and directed. Raphael died in 1520, at age thirty-six; one of the ways he was able to accomplish so much work in his short life was that he set up a large and very specialized workshop that was able to execute his ideas quickly. The popes for whom Raphael worked were builders as well as impatient decorators, and they wanted whole suites of new rooms painted quickly. The frescoes for the Vatican Stanze, a series of private rooms for Pope Julius II, were Raphael’s first commissions when he came to Rome. Raphael saw printmaking as a way of using some of the many drawings he produced as guidance for workshop members, some for projects that worked out differently in the end or were never executed. So the fourth point about attributions of authorship would have to do with the making and reuse of workshop drawings. The drawing for the engraving of the scene of the Gods on Parnassus in Figure 10 was a version of the final painting in the Vatican for which Apollo is playing a lyre rather than a viola-like instrument, and the positioning of the figures is quite different.

A fifth point would be that Marcantonio also had a workshop of talented engravers, one of whom evidently had the job of engraving the shuttered windows in the center of the print that make this not just an example of Raphael’s inventiveness, but also a souvenir view of the magnificently decorated new apartments in the papal palace. The inscription at the bottom specifies that “Raphael painted this in the Vatican.” Attention is called to Raphael’s authorship, and also the fact that his work was worthy of the attention of a pope. Marcantonio’s craftsman’s monogram, “MAF” for “Marcantonio Fecit,” just visible below, claims credit for the craft. The fact that this was not exactly the image that was painted in the Vatican, although most likely

44. For the organization of Raphael’s workshop, see FRANCIS AMES-LEWIS, THE DRAFTSMAN RAPHAEL (1986).
45. SHOEMAKER & BROUN, supra note 29, at 155-57; Pon, supra note 29, at 50-51.
46. SHOEMAKER & BROUN, supra note 29, at 155 (discussing more than one hand identified in the engraving and a reproduction of the print before the addition of the shutters).
made from a preliminary drawing for it, and the fact that it was not engraved solely by Marcantonio, would not have bothered many people.

How far could you change an artist’s invention and still call it the artist’s invention? The engraving of Moses in Figure 3, also for the tourist trade, explicitly says that it shows the statue made by the hand of Michelangelo in marble for Pope Julius’s tomb. It also reproduces the marble architecture of the throne on which the prophet sits, more or less faithfully. A print made of Michelangelo’s Vatican Pietà, instead, made two years after the artist’s death, faithfully copied his sculpture down to the signature inscribed on a sash across the Virgin’s chest, and inscribed with the information that it is in the Vatican and was sculpted by Michelangelo, all important selling points for the print. The engraver, Adamo Scultori, placed his craftsman’s monogram in the lower center, and by contributing a landscape that removed the work from the context of the tomb for which it was originally the altarpiece, made it a scene of the Virgin lamenting the
death of her Son in the open air. The print provided a glimpse of a famous work by a favorite artist, and it gave the engraver a venue for producing a devotional scene in which the central figures were invented by someone else. The great feats of invention in the visual arts had been, since antiquity, representation of the human body in narrative scenes. Landscape elements and ornament were never considered to be as important, in spite of the signatures on the many sheets of Renaissance ornament prints. The inscription in the Scultori print, in fact, claimed for Michelangelo the portrayal in marble of the Virgin’s great love for her dead Son. Landscape, ornament, and still life were secondary, which did not mean they were not worth a lot of money to the right people. Although the rights-bearing author would have been the engraver, commercially, the work meant nothing without Michelangelo’s name attached to it. Late in life, Michelangelo carved another Pietà, also called The Deposition, which is now in Milan. The prolific Counter-Reformation printmaker Cherubino Alberti engraved it, obtaining a papal privilege for his print, and declaring in its margin his debt to the famous inventor of the marble sculpture. In his engraving, the statue is set in a wooded landscape. Alberti reinforced the reproductive nature of his own share in the work by clearly including, with Michelangelo’s figural group, the marble base on which they actually stand. However, the lack of two legs on the sculpture of Christ, which has puzzled viewers since the sixteenth century, also proved problematic for Alberti and he took the liberty of making a correction. He awkwardly added a second leg, squeezing it into the space where the sculptor had not left room for one. Is this still the statue that Michelangelo made out of marble in Rome?

The engraver Enea Vico ran into a different kind of trouble when he engraved Venus cheating on her husband, Vulcan, by making love to Mars, who seems to have come for a fitting of new armor (Figure 11). Vulcan, the armorer of the Gods, is working away at his forge; the bow that lies next to him on the floor also acts as the horns that are the universal sign of the cuckold. The print is inscribed “Francesco Parmigianino Invenit,” making the print marketable by attributing the authorship of the design to the very popular Mannerist artist from Parma. The engraver has added the date and his own craftsmanly monogram on the windowsill, clearly legible, but taking a backseat, attribution-wise. However, Parmigianino had died three years before, so not only the actual engraving of the print, but also even the idea to make an engraving from his design, must have had little to do with him. When the Roman publisher Antonio Salamanca got hold of the plate he did more than add his publisher’s line to the
Authorship in Renaissance art was as complex a matter as authorship today, but it was vested in different kinds of creative acts, which each author-figure could protect in some way during his or her lifetime. The new trade of printmaking, which was both lucrative and at first completely free of guild regulation, was responsible for pressure that resulted in a new precision about distinguishing the roles of the designers, printmakers, and publishers involved in the creation of a printed image. Changing ideas of the inventor’s role, a growing capitalist market, the institution of museums and art dealers that made the
role of individual patrons less important in the creation of a work, and
the foundation of art academies at the end of the sixteenth century all
helped end the old guild system. The eighteenth century, it seems,
would be the last one up to now that honored the communal guild
ways and corporate ideas of creative agency, and the first century that
privileged the expressive inventions of individual, genius-like authors
over any other creative act.47

47. On the eighteenth century as the turning point for this sort of thinking, see Katie Scott,
Authorship, the Académie, and the Market in Early Modern France, 21 Oxford Art J. 27