CHAPTER THREE

COSÌ NEL MIO PARLAR VOGLI’ ESSER ASPRO

E per non lasciare affatto la pittura, fece una Nostra Donna in una tavola tonda a messer Agnol Doni, cidadin fiorentino, della qual egli da lui ebbe ducati settanta. Se ne stette alquanto tempo quasi senza far niuna cosa in tal arte, dandosi alla lezione de’ poeti e oratori volgari e a far sonetti per suo diletto, finché, morto Alessandro papa Sesto, fu a Roma da papa Giulio Secondo chiamato...

Reworking nobility

As he began work on the tondo the young Michelangelo was confronting Leonardo’s dismissive view of sculptors as mere mechanics:

Sculpture is not a science but a very mechanical art, because it causes its executant sweat and bodily fatigue... The sculptor undertakes his work with greater bodily exertion than the painter, and the painter undertakes his work with greater mental exertion. The truth of this is evident in that the sculptor when making his work uses the strength of his arm in hammering, to remove the superfluous marble or other stone which surrounds the figure embedded within the stone. This is an extremely mechanical operation, generally accompanied by great sweat which mingles with the dust and becomes converted into mud. His face becomes plastered and powdered all over with marble dust, which makes him look like a baker, and he becomes covered in minute chips of marble, which makes him look as if he is covered in snow. His house is in a mess and covered in chips and dust from the stone. The painter’s position is quite contrary to this...¹

Simultaneously, Leonardo was reformulating the notion of chiaroscuro. Begun in Milan in the Virgin of the Rocks, Leonardo’s experiments with painterly sfumato continued in Florence with the Madonna of the Yarnwinder (now known only in copies) and the portrait of Monna Lisa.² Had the Annunziata cartoon ever been realized as a paint-

² Freedberg, 23, 28: “Leonardo has observed not only the object he describes
ing, Michelangelo could have expected a similar treatment of forms seen through atmosphere in terms of infinitely subtle gradations of color which tended to dissolve hard linear boundaries. Along with everyone else in Florence he must have perceived that what Vasari would call the *maniera secca e cruda* of the quattrocento was past and that Leonardo was leading Italian painting in a new direction—one which must have been profoundly inimical to his own sculptural intuition of *rilievo*.

Although little is known of the Doni-Strozzi marriage, Michelangelo’s patron, whose family had made its money in wool weaving, was probably anticipating his own problems of class. By 1504 the Strozzi were an extended family of bankers, diplomats, lawyers and also citizens of quite modest means; its most prominent branch was headed by the banker Filippo Strozzi, one of the wealthiest men in Florence. Maddalena di Giovanni di Marcello came from a dignified line of Florentine civil servants and ambassadors. Her father had been a prior and diplomatic representative of Florence; her grandfather, a lawyer *in utroque iure*, had served as Florentine ambassador to three popes; her great-grandfather Strozza had been gonfaloniere in 1392, and one of his sisters, Maddalena, had wed Luchino Visconti, *signore* of Milan, in 1381. In joining himself to the Strozzi but its effect of interaction with surrounding atmosphere… light has been raised to a role in description equal to that of drawing (which, in Leonardo’s more developed sfumato, light would quite displace); still more important, it has become a major factor in the making of the whole pictorial scheme. In the *Virgin of the Rocks* chiaroscuro has begun to dominate color and absorb it, substituting for the analytic effect of quattrocentesque color a visual continuity… *Sfumato*, here [in the Portrait of Monna Lisa] developed for the first time in Leonardo’s oeuvre to the status of a primary pictorial means, supplies a unitary visual stuff in which the matter which makes up the image has been bound. The *sfumato* is more than a way of seeing forms or of relating them to one another; it is also the carrier of attitude toward content. The *sfumato* works to melt and soften… Leonardo describes textures, not just of substances but of the very air…” See also Farago, “Leonardo’s *Battle of Anghiari*: a Study in the Exchange between Theory and Practice”; Hall, *Color and Meaning: Practice and Theory in Renaissance Painting*, 94-97. For Michelangelo’s hatched drawing of *Saint Anne and the Virgin* as a critique of *sfumato* see chapter 1, note 24.

3 For the history of the Strozzi see Goldthwaite, *Private Wealth in Renaissance Florence*, 31 ff. During the course of the fourteenth century the Strozzi had become so numerous and their interests so diverse that by its end they had ceased to be a clan. Strozzi were to be found at every social and economic level (34). For another unequal marriage to Catherina Strozzi, a sister of Filippo, see Phillips, *The Memoir of Marco Parenti: A Life in Renaissance Florence*, 71-95.

4 See Litta.