Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (1568), "Donatello"

FILIPPO'S friend Donato, who was always called Donatello, was born in Florence in the year I383, and produced many works in his youth; but the first thing that caused him to be known was an Annunciation carved in stone for the church of S. Croce in Florence.

After this he made for the facade of S. Maria del Fiore a Daniel and a S. John the Evangelist, and within the same church, for the organ gallery, those figures which, though they are only roughly sketched, seem when you look at them to be alive and move. For Donatello made his figures in such a way that in the room where he worked they did not look half as well as when they were put in their places. It was so with the S. Mark, which in company with Filippo he undertook for the joiners (though with Filippo's goodwill he completed it all himself). When the masters of the company saw it while it was on the ground they did not recognise its value, and stopped the work; but Donatello begged them to let him put it up and work upon it, and he would turn it into quite another figure. Then, having set it up and screened it from view for a fortnight, when he uncovered it, although he had not touched it, everyone was astonished at it. For the armourers he made a S. George in armour, very full of life, with all the beauty of youth and the courage of the soldier.

Duke Cosimo de' Medici admired his talents so much that he made him work for him constantly; and he on his part bore such love to Cosimo that he undertook what he wished at the least sign, and obeyed him. There is a story told of a Genoese merchant who, by the mediation of Cosimo, prevailed upon Donatello to make a bronze head for him. When it was finished, the merchant coming to pay him, thought that Donatello asked too much, so the matter was referred to Cosimo. He had it brought to the upper court of the palace and placed on the wall overlooking the street, that it might be seen better. But when he tried to settle the difference, he found the merchant's offer very much below Donatello's demand, and turning to him he said it was too little. The merchant, who thought it too much, answered that Donatello had worked upon it for a month, or a little more, and that would give him more than half a florin a day. Donatello upon that turned upon him in anger, thinking these words too great an insult, and telling the merchant that he had found means in a hundredth part of an hour to destroy the work of a year, he gave the head a sudden blow and knocked it down into the street, where it was broken into many pieces, adding that it was evident he was in the habit of bargaining about beans and not statues. The merchant repenting, offered to give him double as much if he would make it again, but neither his promises nor Cosimo's entreaties could make him consent.

To sum up, Donatello was so admirable in knowledge, in judgment, and in the practice of his art that he may be said to have been the first to illustrate the art of sculpture among the moderns; and he deserves the more commendation because in his time few antiquities had been uncovered. He was one of those who aroused in Cosimo de' Medici the desire to bring antiquities into Florence. He was most liberal and courteous, and kinder to his friends than himself; nor did he care for money, keeping it in a basket hanging from the ceiling, where his workmen and friends could help themselves without saying anything to him. When he got old, therefore, and could not work, he was supported by Cosimo and his friends. Cosimo dying, recommended him to Piero his son, who, to carry out his father's wishes, gave him a farm in Cafaggiuolo on which he could live comfortably.

Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists* (1568), "Michelangelo"

Thus, Michelangelo did a wax model depicting a young David with a sling in hand, as the symbol of the palace, for just as David had defended his people and governed them with justice, so, too, those who governed this city should courageously defend it and govern it with justice: he began the statue in the Works Department of Santa Maria del Fiore, where he erected a scaffolding between the wall and the tables surrounding the marble, and, working continuously - without letting anyone see it, he brought the statue to perfect completion. The marble had been mutilated and spoiled by Master Simone, and in some places even Michelangelo's will-power did not suffice to achieve what he wished; so he allowed some of Master Simone's original chisel marks to remain on the extremities of the marble, a few of which can still be seen. And Michelangelo certainly performed a miracle in restoring to life a block of marble left for dead.

When the statue was completed, various disputes arose over how, given its size, it should be transported to the Piazza della Signoria. For that reason, Giuliano da San Gallo and his brother Antonio built a very strong wooden frame and suspended the statue from it with ropes so that when it was shaken it would not break or, rather, just come tumbling down, and they pulled it with winches over flat planks laid upon the ground and set it in place. They tied a slip-knot in the rope that held the statue suspended which moved very easily and tightened as the weight increased, a very fine and ingenious device that I have in my book drawn up by Michelangelo himself, a secure and strong knot for holding weights, which is remarkable. Around this time it happened that Piero Soderini saw the statue, and it pleased him greatly, but while Michelangelo was giving it the finishing touches, he told Michelangelo that he thought the nose of the figure was too large. Michelangelo, realizing that the Gonfaloniere [Soderini's official title] was standing under the giant and that his viewpoint did not allow him to see it properly, climbed up the scaffolding to satisfy Soderini (who was behind him nearby), and having quickly grabbed his chisel in his left hand along with a little marble dust that he found on the planks in the scaffolding, Michelangelo began to tap lightly with the chisel, allowing the dust to fall little by little without retouching the nose from the way it was. Then, looking down at the Gonfaloniere who stood there watching, he ordered: 'Look at it now.' 'I like it better,' replied the Gonfaloniere: 'you've made it come alive.' Thus Michelangelo climbed down, and, having contented this lord, he laughed to himself, feeling compassion for those who, in order to make it appear that they understand, do not realize what they are saying; and when the statue was finished and set in its foundation, he uncovered it, and to tell the truth, this work eclipsed all other statues, both modern and ancient, whether Greek or Roman; and it can be said that neither the Marforio in Rome, nor the Tiber and the Nile of the Belvedere, nor the colossal statues of Monte Cavallo can be compared to this David, which Michelangelo completed with so much measure and beauty, and so much skill. For the contours of its legs are extremely beautiful, along with the splendid articulations and grace of its flanks; a sweeter and more graceful pose has never been seen that could equal it, nor have feet, hands, and a head ever been produced which so well match all the other parts of the body in skill of workmanship or design. To be sure, anyone who sees this statue need not be concerned with seeing any other piece of sculpture done in our times or in any other period by any other artist.

Michelangelo received four hundred *scudi* in payment from Piero Soderini, and the David was erected in the year 1504; this statue brought great fame to Michelangelo in the art of sculpture.

Domenico Bernini, *Life of Gian Lorenzo Bernini* (1713), "Some of Gian Lorenzo's Works Executed at the Request of Paul V. The Accolades he Received for Them"

The pope had already been informed of the progress that Gian Lorenzo was making in his studies and of the applause that he received for the aforementioned works. Greatly pleased by these reports, Paul therefore summoned Gian Lorenzo to his presence and first requested that he execute his portrait in marble. He then ordered him to create, according to his own inspiration, four noble statues that were to adorn the palace of his Villa Pinciana, where they were to be placed. In little time Gian Lorenzo produced a finished portrait of such fine style that the pope kept it in his own room until the day of his death. But of greater concern in Gian Lorenzo's mind was his work on the statues destined for the palace in the pope's villa. He was well aware of the significance of the commitment he had undertaken, that is, the execution of the orders of a pontiff involving the adornment of one of the most famous villas of Europe.

Among the principal [classical] works of highest quality in that collection are the *Seneca in the Bath* and the *Venus and Cupid* (these two statues believed to be the work of Praxiteles); the *Gladiator of Agasius*, celebrated sculptor of the city of Ephesus; the *Hermaphrodite* found in the gardens of Sallust near the Quirinal Hill during the pontificate of the same Paul V; and the head of *Alexander the Great* in bas-relief. Such was the company in which Bernini had to add his own works. The competition with these celebrated artists, the comparison that would be made between the statues, and the expectations on the part of all created great apprehension in him.

However, Gian Lorenzo's spirit, which loved arduous and noble challenges, did not for a moment doubt his success, and he thus took on and completed the work on the four statues, only one of which by itself would have worthily occupied any senior artist. The works in question were the group of Aeneas, Anchises, and Ascanius, who, with their household gods, flee from the conflagration of Troy; David who, with slingshot in hand, is in the act of hurling his volley against the giant Goliath; the third, the group of Daphne who flees Apollo her pursuer and is beginning, in splendid fashion, to be transformed into a laurel tree; and, last, the sculpture of Pluto, which, together with the rape of Proserpina, displays an admirable contrast of tenderness and cruelty. In addition to the beautifully proportioned design of each of these statues, what caused great wonder in the artists of the time was the fact that Gian Lorenzo brought all four groups—which in their scale were much larger than life—to completion in just two years. To those who, marveling over this fact, questioned him about it, he would respond that "Whenever he was working, he felt himself so inflamed by and so in love with what he was doing, that he would devour, rather than merely work, the marble." Moreover, as he would say in his older years, "In his youth, he never made a wrong stroke," so superior was he in his art, even at that age. In fact, it happened once that, visiting the same villa forty years later with Cardinal Antonio Barberini and examining these works of his, Bernini sighed aloud, exclaiming, "Oh, what little progress I have made in my art from the time of my youth when I could work marble in this way!"

The degree of perfection and mastery contained in each of these four statues must be judged by one's eye in observing them, rather than by reading descriptions of the pen consisting of a vain hyperbole of words. Suffice it to say that when the statues were made accessible to public viewing by those in the profession, a great crowd of artists, along with the most eminent of the

Roman nobility, flocked to see the works. As a result, Cardinal Borghese used to remark that "His villa had decreased in value from the moment that Bernini's works entered it." What he meant was that, uninterested in the other lovely delights therein contained, visitors to his home would now go immediately to the rooms where the statues were located; satiating themselves fully on the sight of the beauty of Bernini's sculptures, they did not even deign to look at the many other works of art scattered throughout that most exquisite garden of delights. From there, people would then head directly to Bernini's house, for some wanted to see him face to face, others wanted to note his mannerisms, while still others wanted to confirm for themselves his age, since the grandeur of those works caused them to believe that he was in fact older than they had been told. In the end, as usually happens in the case of great marvels, Bernini was pointed out by all as a monster of genius.

As far as the statue of David is concerned, in carving its face, Bernini, with the help of a mirror, depicted his own features, doing so with an expressivity completely and truly marvelous. And it was Cardinal Maffeo Barberini himself, a frequent visitor to the artist's studio, who many times held the mirror with his own hands. The same cardinal feared that the figure of Daphne, a female nude, albeit of stone but from the hand of Bernini, could perhaps offend the modest eye. He therefore had inscribed below the statue the following verses and thus rendered the work even more famous by the addition of this felicitous issue of his most noble hand:

"Any lover who of the pleasure of a fleeting outward form is in pursuit will fill his hands with mere branches and seize only bitter fruit."