#Nardo di Cione, \*Last Judgment,\* ca. 1363#

##Bigallo, Loggia##

The wall just within the confines of the [Bigallo’s loggia](insert link) contains a now-damaged and detached fresco that probably illustrated the theme of the \*Last Judgment\* that artists like [Nardo di Cione](insert link) found so appealing during the fourteenth century (figure 1). The painting faced out toward the public from the chamber just inside the entrance, positioned on its west wall and facing east toward the [Campanile](insert link) that [Andrea Pisano](insert link) had recently ornamented with dozens of [marble reliefs](insert link).

The composition features the figure of Christ, who blesses viewers from his perch on a celestial cloudbank while holding in his left hand the open book emblazoned with the Alpha and Omega (the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, symbolic of the notion that Christ is the beginning and the ending of all things). Two pairs of angels flank him, some genuflecting with musical instruments in their hands and the others crossing their arms over their chests while gazing at their performing mates (figure 2). A constellation of gold stars covers what remains of the blue field below, damaged when the [sculptural ensemble](insert link) produced by [Alberto Arnoldi](insert link) was removed and relocated elsewhere in the Bigallo.

Circumstantial evidence points toward Nardo as the artist responsible for the \*Last Judgment\*. [Documents](insert link) tell us that Nardo was paid to paint the ceiling vaults of the Bigallo in October, 1363 and that, at the time of his death two years later, he bequeathed to the institution a portion of his estate. Although neither archival reference pertains specifically to the wall on which the \*Last Judgment\* appears, scholars agree that Nardo was probably the author of the painting, and that the picture was most likely produced sometime in the early 1360s, at roughly the same time as Arnoldi’s \*Madonna and Child\* was sculpted for and installed in the loggia.

The damage to this fresco obviously impedes our understanding and interpretation of it within the context of the Bigallo’s development as a charitable, social, and political institution. Certainly its subject matter made clear the spiritual qualities to which the [Company of the Misericordia](insert link) aspired, while the rather fierce representation of the uncompromising Christ figure must have injected into this setting – and projected onto the street where passersby could see it – a severe reminder of the fleetingness of time and the certainty of judgment at the End of Days. For precisely these reasons the \*Last Judgment\* was the perfect image for a confraternity eager to coax new members (and deep-pocketed donors) into its midst, for this reminder of the importance the Christian faith placed on works of charity was more than a subtle hint that this was a place worth supporting.

Bent, George R. \*Public Painting and Visual Culture in Early Republican Florence\* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2017)

Kreytenberg, Gert. “Die Trecenteske Dekoration der Stirnwand im Oratorio del Bigallo.” \*Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz\*20 (1976): 397-403.

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