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Dissertation

**REPAINT, REFRAME, RENEW: UPDATING SACRED IMAGES DURING THE
EARLY ITALIAN RENAISSANCE**

by

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ABSTRACT

Several early Italian Renaissance sacred images underwent significant restorations shortly after their completion, despite the fact that the paintings had suffered no apparent damage. Paintings that were completed in the mid-to-late 1200s were restored only 30-40 years later. This dissertation explores the motivation behind the premature restorations of these intact and newly-created sacred images.

As religious artworks, these objects were expected to move their viewers spiritually and to work as devotional intermediaries between the viewer and the sacred figures represented in the image. Some scholars contend that these paintings were prematurely restored in an effort to align the images with contemporary conceptions of style.

Based on a scholarly analysis of historical and analytical literature, and close examination of the objects, this dissertation asserts a more compelling and nuanced motive for the restoration of these sacred images: these restorations were prompted by a desire to increase their spiritual efficacy by forging an

empathic connection with viewers. The selective restorations primarily focused on repainting the faces and hands of important figures, with little or no repainting devoted to drapery, background or supporting figures. Repainting figures' faces and hands enabled viewers to connect emotionally with these painted intermediaries and to create a greater empathic bond.

I examine the motivation for artists to restore images prematurely and selectively within several contextual frameworks: the impact of viewers' empathic connection with images is rooted in art historical and rhetorical theory and supported by current brain research; the appeal of early Italian Renaissance vernacular culture created a receptive environment for empathic connections to literature, poetry, devotional music and imagery; and early art historical writings on empathy.

Chapter One examines the history of early Italian Renaissance restoration practices. Chapter Two explores how the art of Duccio di Buoninsegna and Giotto di Bondone motivated the selective repainting of devotional images. Chapters Three and Four present case studies of early Italian Renaissance sacred images that were prematurely repainted and reframed. Specific works examined include Coppo di Marcovaldo's *Madonna del Bordone*, 1261, Guido da Siena's *Maestà*, ca. 1270, and Taddeo Gaddi's *Madonna and Child with Four Saints*, ca. 1340-45.