

## **SmART Business**

By Frank To PSSA SGFA



### **Frank To PSSA SGFA, Florence**

Art likes money. Money likes art. The two have always had a complicated relationship.

It might be disheartening to hear that major corporations such as BP and Shell fund the creative & cultural sector. This is, however, nothing new.

The patronage of the arts by institutions of wealth, power and influence has a long, interesting history spanning centuries.

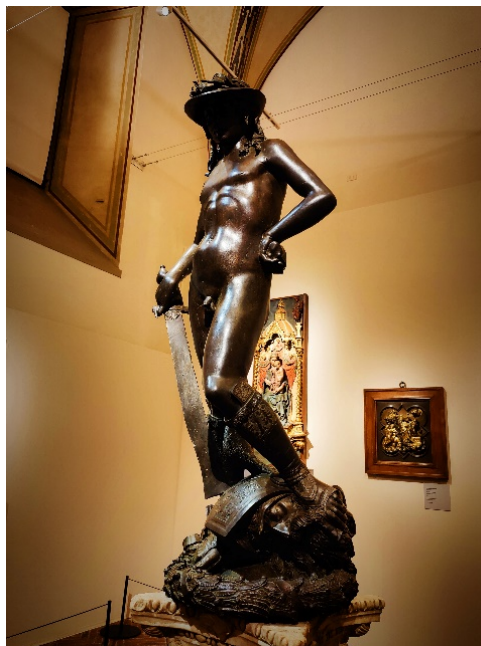
One case that has left a mark on the history of art is the Medici family, commonly known as the Godfathers of the Renaissance. I recently became reacquainted with their legacy during a trip to Florence.



**View point of central Florence taken from Ponte Vecchio**

The Medici were an Italian banking family-turned-political dynasty that consolidated power in the city of Florence during the first half of the 15th century. It was their patronage of the likes of Da Vinci and Michelangelo ...that led to the production of some of western art's greatest artistic feats.

My first introduction to the Medici came in the form of their ubiquitous presence in the book 'Lives of the Artists' by Giorgio Vasari. Many see the Medici responsible for the achievements of artists such as the sculptor, Donatello and painter, Fra Angelico. They are perhaps history's best example of corporate patronage of the arts.



**David by Donatello, bronze, 1435–40, Florence, Bargello**

In Florence today, it is impossible to escape the visual influence of the Medici. Masterpieces such as *La Primavera* by Botticelli hang in the Uffizi Gallery, itself founded when the last Medici, Anna Maria Luisa, bequeathed her family's art collection to the city in 1737. Architectural marvels such as the dome of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, designed by Brunelleschi, were only possible because of Medici patronage.



**Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore**

The Medici understood that artistic patronage was good PR. They knew that funding the arts would ensure their legacy in both Florence and Europe for the generations that followed them.

The corporations of today still look to artistic patronage for marketing gain. In 2013, I was doing a series of work inspired by Dante's *Inferno* based on the Glasgow Underground. One of my patrons was the Royal Bank of Scotland. Sponsors of my other works have included Deloitte, Walter Scott & Partners Investment, the Northern Ireland Executive, among others. These have been highly beneficial to my career and creative output, through the provision of funding for materials, exhibition spaces and marketing.

FRANK TO

RBS was founded in Scotland in 1727 just as the Scottish Enlightenment was beginning. Since then the bank has supported talent from all walks of life; architects to artists, engineers to entrepreneurs and scientists to designers. We take our role in Scottish society seriously and we continue to nurture, develop and support talent across Scotland.

Frank To is one of Scotland's brilliant young artists who's work is known far beyond his homeland for his adventurous and bold style. I hope you all enjoy what is both a creative and a thought provoking collection."

Ken Barclay, Chair of the Scotland Board  
The Royal Bank of Scotland

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the leith gallery

You and your guests are cordially invited to a private view of  
**Dante's Divine Comedy**  
A solo exhibition of New Paintings by Frank To  
supported by **RBS**  
Together with work by applied artists

Friday 5th April 6pm-8pm  
Saturday 6th April 11am until 1pm  
Wine

Work is available for sale from receipt of the catalogue  
Please look at our website for more images from Wednesday 27th March onwards  
The exhibition will run until Saturday 27th April

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Hours of Opening: Mon to Fri 11am-5pm, Sat 11am to 4pm  
Or by appointment

### Dante's Divine Comedy catalogue design with RBS sponsor logo 2013

Today many artists ask if it is really worth having the backing and prestige of financial institutions and business corporations. Many object to such influences as they feel it compromises the integrity of their work. This is especially true of corporations who could be accused of 'art-washing'.

Having a diversity of creative output is good for culture. But without private investment, it is highly dependent on public funding, something that is under constant strain due to a series of economic crises. Young artists cannot afford to decline alternative sources of income if they wish to pursue their creative endeavors.

With this moral and creative conflict of corporate patronage, is there any hope for the new young generation of Scottish artists? The traditional patronage now comes in the form of sponsorship, mentorship and prizes.

Today's equivalent of the Medici could be accountant firm KPMG who are sponsors for Royal Ulster Academy in Belfast, Scottish whisky distiller Glenfiddich with their artist in residence programme and tech firm XPPen working with the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh to support the RSA Schools Art Award.

Though both public and private corporations may appear to have influences in the arts, an increasing number are now working in collaboration with the creative & cultural sector such as Glasgow City Council setting up the City Centre Mural Grant Fund. Collaborations like these are refreshing. They encourage meaningful, environmental and economical partnerships.



### **Glasgow mural of Billy Connolly by Jack Vettriano**

Overall, the aspiring young Scottish artist should take note from the Medici that good art and business go hand in hand with each other. It is a mutually beneficial relationship. The benefits of modern patronage should be reaped as there have been several shake ups that question the integrity of art benefactors such as the Sackler Family. One could consider this as 'woke', but creatives should take more notice of the principles of any potential financial supporter and ensure that they are consistent with their own ethics.. Otherwise, moral dilemmas and conflicts could ensue, as they have for those who are entangled in the Sackler's opioid scandal. The ideal ethics of art patronage today must ensure good brand and ethical alignments. Swatch for example are the main sponsor partner of Biennale Arte in Venice and offer the Swatch Art Peace Hotel artist residency in Shanghai. The continuing existence of art sponsorship does ensure longevity and development in the creative & cultural sector which now contributes more than £5 billion to the Scottish economy.