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**From Rhetoric to Art
Alberti's Theorisation of Visual Arts and Its Political Reason**

The answer to the questions "which is the foremost human activity, and which activity is most worthy of a man?", was for the ancients simple enough: that can only be the activity of politics, with its concomitant skill of rhetoric. Consequently, the arts of politics and rhetoric were thoroughly theorised, they were profoundly thought over and written about in a systematic and analytical manner by the most important philosophers of the period. With the Italian Renaissance, in the context of humanism and the emerging modern state, the position of the most excellent human skill began to be taken over by the arts of building, of painting and of sculpting. The key step in that direction, as is well known, was made by Leon Battista Alberti. He was the first to truly theorise the visual arts – hitherto lowly, manual skills, unworthy of philosophical enquiry – and thus to provide the foundation on which the modern conception of art could be developed. Himself being a humanist, writing in Latin for the cultivated governing elite, he grounded his project in the importance of the visual representation within the political situation of the day. Whereas Alberti's borrowings from the rhetoric have been profusely commented upon and much has been established about the political uses of visual arts in the Renaissance, nonetheless the final consequence of his particular association of rhetoric and politics and visual arts has not yet been sufficiently emphasized and explicated.