

Marta Battisti

**“Whoever Belongs to God Hears What God Says” (John 8:47)
The Other as Deaf in Two Frescoes by Filippo Lippi and Gualtiero Padovano**

This essay explores the Christian visualization of religious Otherness in connection to deafness in Italian paintings of the 15th and 16th centuries. Following the words of John 8:47 “Whoever belongs to God hears what God says”, theologians developed through centuries the idea of a Christian community based on listening to God with the ears of the spirit or the ears of the heart. Hence, deafness is conceived as the hallmark of the Christian Other: Jews, heretics or false believers are therefore perceived as “spiritually” deaf. The essay aims to investigate how Christian images depict the Other as deaf as opposed to the Christian who listens. To this end, it focuses mainly on two frescoes that stand out for the originality with which they illustrate this contrast: the *Disputation of St Stephen with the Elders of the Sanhedrin* (1452-1567) by Fra Filippo Lippi in Prato’s Cathedral and *St Anthony of Padua preaching to the fishes* (1530-1537) attributed to Gualtiero Padovano in the Oratory of the Walnut Tree near Padua. Starting from this iconographic analysis, I reflect on the effect these frescoes might have had on their viewers. Conceived to be seen by Christians, their main purpose appears to be the construction of Christian identity based on listening: a listening Us versus the deaf Other.