

## **Ellen Chao: Donor portraits in Florentine private chapels 1400-1500**

During the Renaissance, one of the most important spaces for artwork commissions was the private chapel. By giving a chapel to an individual family, both the church and the given family enjoyed in a social and commercial symbiosis. The church profited financially, and the ownership of a chapel also satisfied the donor's spiritual and secular need for social recognition, thus commemorating the family. The chapel was also intended to display religious devotion, hence it facilitated salvation. The status of the chapel, both private and semi-public, constituted a very unique space, a perfect space for self-presentation of the donors. On the one hand, direct physical access to it was strictly limited to privileged members of the owning family; on the other hand, it was a part of the church with open visual access. As the awareness of individuality increasingly became dominant in Florentine society in the course of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the incorporation of the donor's portrait into a religious theme became a prevalent motif in art commission, especially displayed in private chapels. Considering the fact that donors themselves rarely physically attended their chapels, the donor portraits were a lavish strategy deployed to establish or reinforce the donor's prestige and authority, what can be seen as the main motive for elite families to commission the portraits. This poster focuses on some features of the donor portraits. Firstly, following the traditional composition since the medieval period, the donor portraits were normally placed outside the *sacra conversazione*. Secondly, the donors were painted in the same scale as the central religious group characters. Thirdly, their portraits and their costumes were depicted with care to detail to allow identification of particular individuals and their social status. Finally, the donor figures were presented as a good example for other believers through their gestures and pious worship.