

Reviews

Aiello, Lucia, Marco Bascapè, and Sergio Rebora, eds. *Il Tesoro dei poveri. Il patrimonio artistico delle Istituzioni pubbliche di assistenza e beneficenza (ex Eca) di Milano*. Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2001. Pp. 495 + 498 b/w and colour ill. No ISBN (hard cover) € 59.81.

Il tesoro dei poveri catalogues over 200 artworks from the collections of Milan's Amministrazione delle Istituzioni pubbliche di assistenza e beneficenza (Ipab). The works span seven centuries (from the 14th to the 20th), and include an impressive array of paintings, sculptures, funerary monuments, and liturgical ornaments, among other media. The catalogue is divided into four parts, according to the locations where the many "treasures" can be found today: the Palazzo Archinto, the Ipab headquarters; the Cimitero Monumentale di Milano; a number of geriatric institutes in Milan and its surroundings; and various rural properties under the Ipab's administration.

The first part begins with a chapter on Palazzo Archinto, the Ipab headquarters; in particular, it looks at its history, architecture and reconstruction, as well as the fresco cycles by Andrea Lanzani, Giambattista Tiepolo and Vittorio Maria Bigari. However, the primary focus of this section is on the benefactor portraits commissioned by various pious associations and charitable organisations over the centuries. Chapters 2 to 9 are of special interest to readers of *Confraternitas*, as they look at the portrait galleries of pious associations founded in the Middle Ages and Early Modern period: il Luogo pio delle Quattro Marie (c. 1305–1784); il Luogo pio della Misericordia (c.1368–1784); il Luogo pio di Santa Caterina in San Nazaro in Brolo (1382–1784); il Luogo pio della Divinità (1429–1784); il Luogo pio dei Poveri Infermi in San Simpliciano (c. 1560–1808); il Luogo pio di Nostra Signora di Loreto (1601–1784); Il Collegio, poi Opera pia, delle Nobili Vedove (1618–1963); and il Luogo pio Melzi (1636–1784).

Chapters 10 to 13 are dedicated to organisations from the period following 1784, the year in which Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II ordered all the *luoghi pii* to be absorbed into the five primary confraternities: Quattro Marie, Misericordia, Carità, Divinità and Loreto. This section provides a brief historical profile of each organisation. We learn, for example, that the Quattro Marie evolved from the confraternity of the Raccomandati della Beata Vergine and that it prioritised devotional works alongside charitable ones (63). In contrast, the Misericordia was founded by a group of merchants and was especially concerned with the protection of artisans and labourers (78).

Unlike other catalogues that focus primarily on the formal elements of the works they showcase, the entries in this volume are especially useful for the information they provide about the religious, political, and artistic context in which benefactors moved and charities functioned.

In the chapter on the Misericordia we read about the famous medic and clergyman Ambrogio Griffi (c. 1420–1493), who was one of the charity's benefactors. His father was a merchant, he enjoyed positive relations with the Sforza family, and was heavily involved in the Observant Movement. Having no children of his own, his will left most of his patrimony to the Misericordia charity. Moreover, his generosity was still felt two centuries later, when, in 1681, the artist Agostino Santagostino produced a portrait of him and five other benefactors of the *luogo pio*. (86–87)

Part two (chapter 14) of the catalogue is the shortest and deals with the funerary monuments of important benefactors located in the Cimitero Monumentale di Milano. Many of these individuals were also depicted in portraits and are therefore covered in the previous section.

Part three (chapters 15 to 20) looks at the artwork of various geriatric institutes founded between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, some now defunct, other still extant. Although most of the art in this section belongs to the eighteenth century or later, there are some earlier works.

The fourth and final part of the book (chapters 21 to 31) looks at the rural properties that came under the administration of the Ipab over the course of the nineteenth century. These include a number of churches, chapels, and religious objects that date to the medieval and early modern periods.

A frequent flaw of catalogues is to include too many decontextualised images. Another is to write too much about artworks whose images are not included, or whose quality is not great. This book does not suffer from either problem. The pictures are of good quality and size, and a generous number are in colour. More importantly, an adequate amount of information is provided. The result is that one does not lose interest looking at portrait after portrait of similarly styled aristocrats, or monuments in their honour. Instead, enough background is provided to make individual works stand out and become meaningful for what they can tell us about the changing nature of confraternal charities and their benefactors, as they moved from a religious to a secular context, over the span of seven centuries.

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