

Reviews

Confraternities and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Italy. Ritual, Spectacle, Image. Eds. Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000. xiv, 314 pp., 65 illustrations. ISBN 0-521-66288-5

This collection of eleven interdisciplinary essays deals with confraternal patronage of the visual arts in Renaissance Italy. The quality and broad range of the volume will be much appreciated specially among art historians, as most of the contributions offer innovative frames to analyze issues of artistic patronage in early modern Europe. In the last three decades, an increasing body of art historical scholarship has been concerned with the socio-cultural contexts that surround the creation of art, considering works of art not only as objects, but also as processes. As a result, the role of confraternities as patrons of the arts in early modern Italy has been broadly acknowledged, but few works have been totally devoted to the issue, analyzing in depth specific cases and identifying the particular circumstances that prompted corporate enterprises.

The collection of articles edited by Barbara Wisch and Diane Cole Ahl represents an important step in this direction, since all the essays deal with case studies that illuminate the understanding of both consecrated and unknown artistic products of confraternal patronage. Two different articles by Louise Marshall and Diane Cole Ahl, for example, analyze the ways in which specific corporate identities were shaped through puntual iconographic and formal programs. As opposed to traditional interpretations that have read quintaessential works of the Italian Renaissance either as responses to troubled times or as reinterpretations of influential models, Marshall and Cole discuss well known altarpieces in relation to their role within the confraternal rituals, reinterpreting their iconographic and compositional features in relation to the individual and collective identities that those panels were supposed to satisfy.

In another line, the essay by Konrad Eisenbichler reminds us about the different and complex patterns of acquisition of confraternal art that were in place in Renaissance Italy. A detailed study of documents belonging to the confraternity of the Arcangelo Raffaello, points to individual donations as the main way of acquiring artistic works, and to the use and reuse of artistic monuments by different confraternal groups. As a result, the traditional interpretative model commission-production is replaced here by a new frame that incorporates also reception and use into the agenda of study of religious monuments.

The political dimension of confraternal commissions is discussed by Nicholas Terpstra. He proposes that confraternal charities in Renaissance Bologna were part of a campaign to reshape the architectural landscape of an important papal stronghold. As a result, confraternal competition and familial rivalry enter also to the intricate game of motivations within corporate patronage.

Other interesting articles complement the panorama of confraternal involvement in the visual arts, exploring the evolution of devotional practices, the roles

of women, and the age's conception of charity, among other issues. In short, this is a comprehensive and interdisciplinary work of research that will become soon a crucial reference in the field.

Monica Dominguez Torres
Fine Art, University of Toronto

La chiesa di San Giorgio a Montemerano. Arte, storia e fede. Eds. Cristina Gnoni Mavarelli, Ludovica Sebgondi, Ulisse Tramonti. Firenze: Edizioni della Meridiana, 2000. 175 pp., illustrations

This volume gives credence to the aphorism that good things come in small packages. It offers an enthrallingly enjoyable, detailed historical look at the church of San Giorgio, consecrated in 1430, in the town of Montemerano (Tuscany). Through the ages, some very prominent artists have contributed their talent to this church's decorations, including Sassetta, Lorenzo di Pietro (known as Vecchietta), and several artists of the *Scola senese*. The artwork itself consists of a surprisingly ample collection of paintings, murals, frescoes, stuccos, brass work, as well as carvings in wood, marble and stone. The volume is divided into two sections; the first consisting of four essays by Adorno della Monaca, Ulisse Tramonti, Ludovica Sebgondi, and Christina Gnoni Mavarelli, highlighting various aspects of the building's history; the second being a fine compilation of photographs of the church's artwork and artefacts.

The first essay, by Adorno della Monaca, begins with a reference to Marshall McLuhan's dictum that "the Medium is the Message", in order to highlight the fact that the Church, in order to propound its doctrine, has oftentimes had to change the media it uses so as to continue successfully to spread the word of God in a fashion that appeals to the varying sentiments of its public. Della Monaca discusses how this particular church very effectively employed various elements of mass appeal and how it applied widely recognized religious and secular iconography to its multi-media approach to religious pedagogy. Ulisse Tramonti then provides a fascinating and informative history of both the church and the town of Montemerano itself. Synthesizing archaeological and documental evidence, Tramonti presents a detailed analysis of the architectural history of San Giorgio from its inception to the 20th century. Ludovica Sebgondi supplies a very interesting and detailed chronology of the numerous renovations and restorations the church has undergone between 1382 (when it already carried the name of San Giorgio but was not yet consecrated as such), and 1999. She identifies Bartolomeo di Giovanni as the person to whom is owed the church's importance, magnificence and prominence amongst the churches of the Maremma. Sebgondi shows how Bartolomeo di Giovanni was solely responsible for bringing to the church the distinguishing honour of a pontifical consecration with elaborate ceremony that was rarely used, as well as being the primary instigator of the artistic tradition that sets San Giorgio apart from the rest of houses of worship in the Maremma. Her analysis is narrated in discursive fashion, containing many