

Notwithstanding the fact that the oratory of that confraternity was destroyed in 1542 by the Genoese to make room for their military fortifications, the Confraternity, along with others, survived only to find their practices under scrutiny in the years of post-Tridentine reform. Buscaglia provides a fascinating account of the effects of Church interests on the autonomy of the Savonese confraternities, outlining the gradual transformation in the focus of confraternity activities from the late sixteenth century to the present.

"La Processione del Venerdì Santo," overseen by the Priorato Generale delle Confraternite, provides a similarly expansive perspective, though it focuses on one particular aspect of confraternity activity, the Good Friday public procession. The next essay, Fulvio Cervini's "Qualche appunto sull'orizzonte sociale della scultura lignea a Savona nel tardo Medioevo," provides a gradual and appropriate segue into the specific focus of the 1999 exhibition: the actual artifacts themselves. Focusing on what is often dismissed as folk art, Cervini presents a clear and critical account of the central issues relating to the use of wooden sculptures as focal points of devotion, issues ranging from the objections of the iconoclasts to the artistic merits of the works. Alessandro Giacobbe's "Il patrimonio architettonico e artistico delle confraternite in Val Nera: un percorso di ricerca" and Marina Venturino's "Le confraternite e il Priamà" supply the relevant physical and social context to the visual record that follows. Divided into sections on sculpture, painting, silverworks, textiles, and furnishings, the catalogue portion is rich in full colour illustrations that attest to the vibrant confraternity tradition in Savona. The volume closes with an extensive bibliography that will provide scholars with plenty of reading for the next century.

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Verdi Webster, Susan. *Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain. Sevillian Confraternities and the Processional Sculpture of Holy Week*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998. xxi, 292 pp. ISBN 0-691-04819-3 US.\$55.

In a richly researched study, Susan Verdi Webster examines the popular tradition of holy week processions of Golden-Age Spain, the lay religious groups that organized them, and the ritual context that surrounded them in order to gain a better understanding of the life-like sculpture created for such processions. Webster's thesis is that such sculptures cannot be separated from their function within religious processions, lest we ignore the dynamic interaction between art, spectacle, and popular religious sentiment. Thus works of art traditionally disparaged by scholars (or merely overlooked) as aesthetically inferior, are here studied within their original ritual context. Webster argues that when used in procession the sculptures become "activated": within the dynamics of the ritual, the sculptures are transformed and function to integrate the human and divine spheres through the emotional and spiritual power they evoke. Although the author claims

that the works are also aesthetically “elevated” within the processional environment, she does not engage in a traditional aesthetic evaluation of them; rather, she moves seamlessly from art history to social and religious history, providing a thorough framework within which the works can be adequately viewed. In doing so, Webster attributes to these “activated” works an “aesthetic of emotion”, that is, a recognition of the synergistic relationship between image and ritual milieu that traditional aesthetic evaluation ignores.

For scholars who have no immediate interest in processional art, the book is nevertheless a useful source of information on penitential confraternities. Focusing on confraternities in Seville, Webster provides many details about them (governing structures, membership screening procedures, rule books, processional activities, ecclesiastical attempts at control, etc.). The first chapter (the longest of the four) can easily stand on its own as an insightful study of the penitential confraternities of Seville. The volume as a whole demonstrates how initially humble lay religious groups “became powerful social and cultural institutions that profoundly influenced the nature of popular religious expression and experience during the Golden Age.”

Webster’s study will be most welcome to students of confraternities, both for its unique interdisciplinary approach and for the many intriguing avenues it opens for further study on the relationship between religious art and its context.

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