

Recent Theses

Roberts, Angela Marisol. “Donor Portraits in Late Medieval Venice c.1280–1413” PhD Thesis, 2007, Queen’s University, Kingston, Canada.

Abstract: Although the donor portrait was extremely popular throughout mainland Italy during the late Middle Ages, art historians have concluded that the motif was not a popular one in fourteenth-century Venice. The city’s republican political structures and its citizens’ supposed abhorrence of public expressions of individuality are often cited as reasons for the relative absence of individual donor portraits.

This dissertation challenges these previous assumptions by examining examples of the genre in Venice. The evidence analyzed includes a catalogue of 83 donor portraits created between 1280 and 1413. I have attempted to reconstruct the social, political and physical environments for these examples and also for those that have been lost through centuries of changing trends and political upheaval. Through case studies of donor portrait subjects from the upper echelons of Venetian society, including doges, nobles, *cittadini*, confraternity groups, guilds and patrician women, it becomes clear that such images were not only widespread but also often clearly intended for public viewing.

Further examination of these visual documents and analyses of socio-historical developments in the period indicate that donor portraits in Venice, like similar portraits in Palaiologan Byzantium and Italy mainly reflect personal concerns about family, status, wealth, professional associations and salvation. Their physical appearance likewise suggests that such images were intended for display usually within the confines of the city parishes and that ultimately donor portraiture in late medieval Venice was no more likely to reflect state ideologies than donor portraiture in other parts of Europe. Once extracted from the tendency of scholars to over-politicize Venetian art of this period such images can be examined for what they are—valuable records of social patronage patterns in late medieval Venice.