

Grassi, Alessandro, Michel Scipioni, and Giovanni Serafini (eds.). *Il rigore e la grazia. La Compagnia di San Benedetto Bianco nel Seicento fiorentino*. Livorno: Sillabe, 2015. Pp. 215 + b/w and colour illustrations. ISBN 978-88-8347-820-8 (paperback) € 28.

This beautifully illustrated and richly produced volume accompanied a 2015 exhibition by the same title held in three rooms adjacent to the Cappella Palatina (palace chapel) in the Palazzo Pitti, in Florence, home to the dukes and grand-dukes of Tuscany from the 1540s to the 1850s. The scope of the exhibition and its catalogue was to focus attention on the artworks commissioned for and by the Confraternity of Saint Benedict of the White Robes (Compagnia di San Benedetto Bianco), so named because of the colour of the robes the brothers wore to distinguish themselves from the homonymous confraternity of Saint Benedict of the Black Robes (Compagnia di San Benedetto Nero).

Founded on 15 August 1357 at the Camaldolese monastery of San Salvatore in the Oltrarno area of Florence by three devout men, the confraternity soon moved across the river to the Dominican convent of Santa Maria Novella where it was given rooms off the Great Cloister and then, in 1570, to rooms specially designed for them by Giorgio Vasari within the convent's Old Cemetery (immediately to the east of the church). Here it remained until the mid-nineteenth century, having somehow managed to avoid all three major suppressions that systematically wiped out most of Florence's confraternal movement (and appropriated its wealth): the Leopoldine suppressions of 1785, the Napoleonic ones of 1808, and the Sabaudian ones of newly united Italy of 1866. The confraternity eventually closed its doors in the mid twentieth century. In a final act of generosity, it donated to the Florentine Curia all the artworks it had accumulated over the centuries; most of which are now housed in the diocese's seminary at Cestello. Thirty-six of these works (all from the Seicento) were part of the exhibition; they included works by the Seicento artists Matteo Rosselli (1578–1650), Jacopo Vignali (1592–1664), Carlo Dolci (1616–1687), Baldassarre Franceschini called il Volterrano (1611–1690), Cristoforo Allori (1577–1621), Vincenzo Dandini (1609–1675), Agostino Melissi (1615/16–1683), Antonio Ruggeri (1615–post 1670), Giovan Battista Bracelli (active 1616–1659), Giovanni Battista Vanni (1600–1669), Lorenzo Lippi (1606–1665), Giovanni Martinelli (1600/04–1659), Simone Pignoni (1611–1698), Matteo Balassi (1604–1667), and Ferdinando Tacca (1619–1686). The majority of these works (twenty-one to be exact) were restored specifically for this occasion, thereby adding further lustre to the exhibition and the catalogue.

The catalogue opens with brief survey by Ludovica Sebgondi of the history of the confraternal movement in Florence that points not only to the active lay religious life in the city, but also to the great variety of sodalities present in the Tuscan city and to the phenomenal surge in

confraternities in the years following the Council of Trent (27–31). The three curators of the exhibition then take turns presenting their research. The first is Michel Scipioni, who describes and analyses the confraternity's various statutes (the first set, from 1448, is item 2 in the exhibition and catalogue), its administrative organization, and its devotional practices (33–49). He also looks at the sodality's membership in the seventeenth century when San Benedetto Bianco was attracting both important artists and intellectuals to its ranks, as well as member of the Florentine nobility. Alessandro Grassi follows with a chapter on the confraternity's historical *sede* (quarters) next to the Old Cemetery in the convent of Santa Maria Novella and the artworks that embellished it (51–73). Giovanni Serafini offers a chapter on art and spirituality at San Benedetto Bianco that is particularly informative given the fact that many of the artworks in the confraternity were produced by artists who were, in fact, members of the sodality, thereby giving us a very unique and invaluable insight into the influence of spirituality on art, and vice versa (75–91). The last essay is by Maria Cecilia Fabbri who looks at an Old Testament cycle of eight octagons inherited by the confraternity in 1680 from its member Gabriello Zuti (1619–80), who around 1650 had commissioned the various works from a number of respected artists (93–105). At this point, the volume turns into a catalogue and provides detailed examinations of the thirty-two artworks in the exhibition, which included not only paintings, but also drawings, a fresco, manuscripts, books, a reliquary, a chalice, a crucifix (107–180). The catalogue also includes ten works “not in the exhibition”, among which a magnificent sixteenth-century *bancone da sacrestia* (183–205).

By bringing to our attention this rich trove of seventeenth-century Florentine works of art in various genres and media and by pointing to their place in the devotional life of an important fourteenth-century confraternity that managed not only to prosper for over six centuries but also to survive three general suppressions, the three curators and two added contributors have helped to refocus our attention on the close connection between the visual and the spiritual, art and religion, but also on the active involvement of artists in the lay religious movement of their time.

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Visintin, Denis, David Di Paoli Paulovich, Rino Cigui. *Le confraternite istriane. Una sintesi*. Fonti e studi per la storia dell'Adriatico orientale, 3. Piran: Società di studi storici e geografici Pirano, 2014. Pp. 246 + 59 figs.+ 5 music scores. ISBN 978-9-6193-4102-5 (hard cover) n.p.

The volume consists of two extensive essays and a sizeable appendix of documents. The first essay, by Denis Visintin, examines the millenarian