

BAD RECEPTION

EXPRESSING DISAPPROVAL OF ART
IN EARLY MODERN ITALY

International Workshop at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz organized by
Diletta Gamberini, Jonathan K. Nelson and Alessandro Nova
15-16 November 2018

ABSTRACTS

Raymond Carlson (Columbia University, New York)

Epistolary Criticism and the Recarving of Michelangelo's *Minerva Christ*

In a pair of letters of early September 1521, Sebastiano del Piombo and Federigo Frizzi wrote to Michelangelo Buonarroti from Rome to decry the allegedly inept carvings by his *garzone* Pietro Urbano of the *Christ* sculpture destined for the Basilica di Santa Maria Sopra Minerva. Urbano had traveled to Rome to oversee the sculpture's arrival and to execute finishing touches. Michelangelo, meanwhile, remained in Florence, consumed by work for the Basilica di San Lorenzo. Whereas most past scholarship has folded these missives into the sculpture's larger history, this paper will scrutinize their rhetorical structures and underlying motives, demonstrating how their artist-authors deployed critical strategies suited to the epistolary form. The specific, coded critiques penned by Sebastiano and Frizzi, as well as Urbano's efforts in his own letters to Michelangelo to militate against potential disparagement, shed light on the function of letters within Michelangelo's workshop as he simultaneously executed sculptural commissions for different cities. The movement of sculptures and assistants not only carried a host of logistical concerns, such as how much carving needed to be executed on site, but also the possibility of damage to objects and to reputations. Urbano and his place in Michelangelo's workshop can only be understood by reconsidering these invectives against his work. Asking how such contemporary criticisms might be reconciled with formalist art historical approaches, this paper examines the *Minerva Christ* and related visual evidence with respect to the sculpture's purported maltreatment.

Raymond Carlson is a Ph.D. candidate at Columbia University specializing in Renaissance and Baroque art history. His dissertation is titled "Michelangelo between Florence and Rome: Art and Literary Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy." He is the recipient of the Anthony M. Clark Pre-Doctoral Rome Prize in Renaissance and Early Modern Studies at the American Academy in Rome, among other academic honors. Prior to beginning his Ph.D., Raymond held the Paul Mellon fellowship at the University of Cambridge, where he completed two Masters with distinction in Art History and Italian. He earned his B.A. *magna cum laude* at Yale University with a double major in Art History and Italian. His publications include a 2014 article in the journal *Italian Studies*, "Eccellentissimo poeta et amatore divinissimo": Benedetto Varchi and Michelangelo's Poetry at the Accademia Fiorentina."

Paolo Celi (Università di Pisa)

Pasquinades by Alfonso de' Pazzi and Paolo Orlandi: "Fatto non l'harebbe a pena Cuio"

In January 1641, don Averardo Niccolini, abbot of the Florentine church of Santa Trinita, commissioned a new set of doors from the woodcarver Jacopo Sani. Once completed, according to Niccolini, "the general consensus is that these are the finest doors ever, both inside and outside Florence." Paolo Orlandi (alias Lo Zoppo Carrozzaio) did not agree, and so he brought new life to the local tradition of pasquinades—already renewed by Curzio Marignolli in his poem attacking the Palazzo dei Visacci—by writing a satirical sonnet in which carved figures talk. In addition to the pasquinade against Sani, Orlandi wrote one against a certain "Poeta Piedi;" this includes the expression *far del Cuio*, to indicate that the artist achieved the very opposite of his intentions. Orlandi's two poems subsequently became part of an anthology assembled by Anton Maria Biscioni, but the editor misinterpreted "Cuio" as another nickname for the Poeta Piedi. In reality, the phrase *far del cuio* relates to an older tradition of artistic vituperia. It appears in a little-known sonnet written a century earlier by Alfonso de' Pazzi (alias l'Etrusco), about the frescoes on the façade of Palazzo Almeni. This decoration was designed by Giorgio Vasari and executed by Cristofano Gherardi, but destroyed two hundred years ago, and known today thanks to Vasari's description of the iconographical programme in his *Vite*. Alfonso de' Pazzi's pasquinade provides a different perspective on the façade, given that the author seized the opportunity to attack not only Vasari but also his favorite target, the humanist Benedetto Varchi.

Paolo Celi is a PhD student in Italian Studies at the University of Pisa. His research project aims to provide a critical edition with commentary of Bronzino's *Libro primo*. He graduated from the University of Florence with a dissertation about Michelangelo's epitaphs on the death of Cecchino Bracci, developed under the supervision of Giuliano Tanturli. An essay of his, concerning one of Bronzino's sonnets for the death of Pontormo has been published in the miscellany in memory of Tanturli (*Storia, tradizione e critica dei testi*, Lecce, 2017).

David Ekserdjian (University of Leicester)

Bad Reception and the Altarpiece

This paper addresses the issue of 'Bad Reception' in the context of the renaissance altarpiece in Italy. Caravaggio's difficulties with the rejection of both his first *Saint Matthew* altarpiece and his *Death of the Virgin* at the very end of the period are almost too well known, but they are far from unique. Patrons were by no means invariably confident they were going to be happy with what they received, and devoted a good deal of time and effort to trying to protect themselves from unpleasant surprises, not least through an elaborate system of legal contracts and related preliminary drawings. Nevertheless, there are a number of cases of altarpieces being rejected, not only on the basis of their iconography, but also of their style. At the same time, patrons on occasion had to deal with a range of situations which led to their not receiving the works they had ordered, above all either because the artists they had commissioned moved elsewhere or died before the altarpieces in question had been completed, or alternatively because their patronal claims were trumped by those of more important recipients.

David Ekserdjian has been Professor of History of Art and Film at the University of Leicester since 2004. After studying modern languages at Cambridge and History of Art at the Courtauld Institute, he was Christie's Fellow at Balliol College, Oxford, from 1983 to 1986 and Slade Fellow at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, from 1987 to 1991. He worked at Christie's from 1991 to 1997, and was then Editor of *Apollo* from 1997 to 2004. Among his books are *Correggio* (1997), *Parmigianino* (2006), and *Alle Origini della Natura Morta* (2007). He has also organised and written the catalogues of

numerous exhibitions, including *Bronze* (Royal Academy, London, 2012), and *Correggio e Parmigianino: Arte a Parma nel Cinquecento* (Scuderie del Quirinale, Rome, 2016).

Gail Feigenbaum (Getty Research Institute)

Vulgarity and the Masterly Manner: Annibale Caracci Cites his Sources

According to Carlo Cesare Malvasia, the Carracci's biographer, Bolognese artists reacted with harsh criticism to the paintings of the young Annibale. They accused him of painting in a vulgar mode, copying nature without adjusting and improving it on the basis of judicious consideration of the good and beautiful in art. This paper proposes that in his monumental painting of the *Butcher Shop* (Christchurch), Annibale fired back at his critics, emphatically deploying citations of the great high renaissance masters precisely to demonstrate how, within the new terms of the Carracci's reform of painting, he could both embody truth to nature as well as improve on august tradition.

Gail Feigenbaum, associate director of the Getty Research Institute, earned her doctorate in art history at Princeton University. A scholar of early-modern European Art, she has held numerous fellowships and awards including the Rome Prize at the American Academy. Before joining the Getty, she worked at the National Gallery of Art, at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, and at the New Orleans Museum of Art. Among the exhibitions she has curated are *Ludovico Carracci; Degas and New Orleans: A French Impressionist in America; Jefferson's America and Napoleon's France; and Annibale Carracci Drawings*. She has published extensively on the Carracci, Caravaggio and 17th century French painting. Her recent books include *Sacred Possessions: Collecting Italian Religious Art* (co-editor Sybille Ebert-Schifferer); *Provenance: An Alternate History of Art* (co-editor Inge Reist), and *Display of Art in the Roman Palace*. She is currently directing a research project on America and the international art market 1880-1930.

Chiara Franceschini (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)

"Ad alcuni è piaciuto, ad altri non punto": stime e giudizi di artisti nella Roma del Cinquecento

This paper discusses the intertwining of iconographic, aesthetic and personal motivations in the reception of sacred artworks, especially chapel and oratory frescoes in Rome, by focusing on two case studies: the Oratorio di San Giovanni Decollato and the chapel of Lucrezia della Rovere in the church of Trinità dei Monti. In both cases, the chief testimony for the 'bad reception' is Vasari, who, as in other instances, was also personally involved. This raises the question of Vasari's reliability as a witness. Do Vasari's judgments reflect his personal point of view or rather a wider discussion among artists, and, more specifically, among Tuscan artists in Rome? One way to tackle this question, in absence of other contemporary sources, is to explore in greater depth the specific role that artists had in estimating, judging and evaluating works of art (and especially large decorative projects) at the different stages of their creation. In the two case studies, for example, we know that Michelangelo was personally involved to a certain degree or, at least, he was requested to intervene by the patrons as estimator. The final section of the paper offers an initial exploration of known instances in Cinquecento Rome when artists had formal roles in estimating or judging works of art.

Chiara Franceschini is Professor for Early Modern Art History at the Institut für Kunstgeschichte, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, having previously worked at the Warburg Institute and UCL, London. She works at the crossroads of the history of art, early modern history and the conflicts surrounding religious images in early modern cultures, as well as on art theory and historiography. Her monograph, *Storia del limbo*, explores the visualization and the debates

surrounding the fate and state of unbaptized people from Mantegna to Michelangelo. Particularly relevant for this conference are her publications on art and inquisition as well as her current ERC project SACRIMA focusing on a comparative investigation of "The Normativity of Sacred Images in Early Modern Europe." For this project, she currently writes on early modern reactions to sacred images as well as on the involvement of artists in legal procedures, the status of drawings and engravings in trials, and the normative power of art in Mediterranean Europe.

Diletta Gamberini (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München)

Genealogies of Biting Tongues: Literary Models for Renaissance Verse against Art

As recent scholarship has demonstrated, the flourishing of the genre of vituperative poetry against artworks represented a distinctive and important feature of the history of art criticism in sixteenth-century Italy. In Venice, Florence, Rome and elsewhere, verse came to be not only the typical encomiastic response to paintings, sculptures and architecture, but also a standard medium of expression for acerbic and ridiculing critiques. Though studies have long elucidated how the renaissance language of poetic praises depends upon the conventions of ancient literary models, the tradition of verse against art has not received comparable attention. The present paper investigates the nature and shaping role of centuries-old hypotexts; it also explores how some recurrent satirical motifs from those ancient sources crossed the boundaries of poetic production and fertilized different types of contemporary art criticism.

Diletta Gamberini is currently an Alexander von Humboldt postdoctoral fellow in the Art History department of the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München. A philologist and literary scholar by training (mainly at the University of Florence), she specializes in the intersections of literature and the visual arts in Renaissance Italy. Her research has been supported by fellowships from Columbia University's Italian Academy for Advanced Studies, Villa I Tatti, and the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz. She has published a book that offers the first major study of Benvenuto Cellini's poetry, and her most recent contributions have appeared in journals including *I Tatti Studies*, the *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, *Italique-Poésie italienne de la Renaissance*, *Annali d'Italianistica* and *Dante Studies*; in 2017 the essay "Vincenzo Danti's Deceits", which she co-authored with Michael Cole, was awarded the Renaissance Society of America's William Nelson Prize for the best article published in *Renaissance Quarterly* in the previous year.

Juan Luis González García (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid)

"It did not please His Majesty": Philip II and the Habsburg Taste for Italian Renaissance Art

King Philip II of Spain (1527-1598), among the most important art collectors of the Renaissance, was a patron as learned and refined as demanding and stringent in his tastes; these did not always coincide with those of his contemporaries. Protector of masters such as Titian and Pompeo Leoni, with whom he maintained an extensive personal correspondence, Philip also esteemed the works of Pellegrino Tibaldi to the same extent that he despised what Federico Zuccari or Luca Cambiaso left in the Monastery-Palace of El Escorial. Thanks to his numerous letters and, above all, to the description of his artistic interests recorded by biographers and chroniclers, such as the Hieronymite friar José de Sigüenza, this paper will try to establish, and comment on, an index of Italian artists who suffered a 'bad reception' on the part of the Prudent King. Significantly, the likes and dislikes of the sovereign, in relation to the Italian Renaissance, paved the way for his successors on the Spanish throne, especially by his grandson Philip IV (1605-1665), the other great, discerning collector and patron of the Habsburg dynasty during the Early Modern Age.

Juan Luis González García is an Associate Professor in Art Theory and History of Art at the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and holds a European PhD in Art History from the Universidad Complutense. His research interests focus on the study of collecting and the connections between art, rhetoric and visual culture in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Hispanic world. He has collaborated in curating three major exhibitions on these themes, *Philip II: A Renaissance Prince* (1998) and *Carolus* (2000), *Isabella the Catholic: The Magnificence of a Reign* (2004). Between 1999 and 2004, he also coordinated and edited *The Inventories of Charles V and the Imperial Family Project* (2010). In 2011 he was awarded a Mellon Visiting Fellowship at Villa I Tatti, followed in 2012 by a Frances A. Yates Fellowship at The Warburg Institute. His most recent monograph is *Imágenes sagradas y predicación visual en el Siglo de Oro* (2015).

Sefy Hendler (Tel Aviv University)

"disfatta in pezi e ... gittata per piazza": The Numerous Failures of Michelangelo's Bronze Statue of Pope Julius II

Few failures were more dramatic and painful in Michelangelo's long career than his monumental bronze statue of Pope Julius II, for the façade of Bologna's San Petronio basilica (1507-1508). Not only did the casting of the bronze initially fail, threatening Michelangelo's reputation (as recorded in his letters to his brother back in Florence), but also the Bolognese public seemed to have had mixed feelings about how the pontiff was represented. According to Giorgio Vasari, in his life of Michelangelo, the Bolognese gentry "turned to Michelangelo saying that the posture was so threatening that the pope seemed to be giving them a curse rather than a blessing". The culmination of the bad reception of the statue was its destruction. Shortly after the work was inaugurated, it was violently dismantled and destroyed by the Bentivoglio supporters once they regained control of the city in 1511. The bronze figure was then cast again into a celebrated canon (called *La Giulia*, after the pope) adding insult to injury for both the pope and the artist; even Michelangelo's exalted reputation did not save the work. Nevertheless, this painful and violent episode was eloquently transformed into a critical success by Michelangelo himself with the help of Condivi, Vasari and Varchi. They portrayed the lost statue as a genuine masterpiece and a proof of Michelangelo's (dubious) mastery in sculpting in bronze. This paper reconsiders Michelangelo's Bologna affaire as a means of detecting and understanding early modern artistic failures, their *modi operandi*, and their influence on artistic historiography. The examination of a series of hostile reactions to the work in different moments offers a more nuanced picture of the different stages of its bad reception by the contemporary public.

Sefy Hendler is a senior lecture in early modern Italian art Tel Aviv University's Art History department. His latest book, *Gracious and Beautiful monster: the Literary Universe of Bronzino's Nano Morgante* (also published in Italian) examined links between literature, painting and botany at the court of the Medici in 16th century Florence. Hendler specializes among other in the *Paragone* between painting and sculpture, the subject of his first book, *La guerre des Arts: Le Paragone peinture-sculpture en Italie XVe-XVIIe siècle* (Rome, 2013) and winner of the l'Erma per l'arte best manuscript prize for the year 2010. Hendler obtained his Doctorat from the Sorbonne (Paris 1 University). He was a *boursier* of the École française de Rome – Villa Médicis, and *borsista* at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz (Max Planck Institut) and was elected in 2016 to the Israeli Young Academy of Sciences, becoming the first art historian to join the institution.

Sofia Magnaguagno (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia/Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main)

Scorci sotto in sù nelle teorie dell'arte del Rinascimento

This paper explores the aesthetic reception of *sotto in sù* representations in renaissance art theory. The differing opinions of theorists are discussed by comparing images (mainly, but not exclusively painted ceilings) to quotations from a range of sources, including treatises on painting, architecture and perspective. Most important, for defining aesthetic questions, is Giorgio Vasari's *Lives*. Special attention is given to lexicon: namely, to the terms and expressions that seem most significant for indicating the often negative reception of *sotto in sù* foreshortening. The connotation of certain terms in specialized texts is discussed in relation to a broader literary and imaginative panorama. We can follow the same term from the time of its first appearance to its use in the context of an author's specific argument and finally to later writings relating to art. In this way, recurring terms can be traced from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century. Analyses of the art in question, in matters of composition and formal aspects, facilitate a consideration of the verisimilitude of theorists' positions. These follow their strategies in developing different argumentations for expressing a personal—and sometimes negative—reception of *sotto in sù*.

Sofia Magnaguagno studied in Padua, Vienna and Ca' Foscari, from which she received her BA in Conservation of Cultural Heritage and Performing Arts Management. She attended the Second Cycle Master Program in Art History at the Goethe Universität in Frankfurt, where in 2016 she obtained a Master of Arts in History of Art with a thesis on *The Sacrificial Death of Marcus Curtius*, a ceiling painting by Veronese housed at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna. Her research focuses on Paolo Veronese and in particular on a cycle of paintings – known as the *Buckingham Series* – by the master and his workshop. She is currently a PhD student at Università Ca' Foscari Venezia/Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main, working on a dissertation entitled, "*I Veronese della collezione Buckingham e la committenza artistica veneziana della Pia Casa del Soccorso.*"

Jonathan K. Nelson (Syracuse University Florence)

Risky Business: Public Portraits in Renaissance Italy

Portraits, especially those on public view, and representing political leaders, always entail a risk to all parties involved. If the image is poorly received—whether by the patron, the sitter, or the intended audience—losses will be incurred. Numerous texts, mainly letters, relating to over two dozen Italian portraits, from the late fifteenth and sixteenth century, illustrate how and why patrons and other viewers expressed their dissatisfaction. Tools from economic analysis and art history—risk management and patronage studies, respectively—help us analyze this material. This paper aims to better understand the complex dynamics involved when a powerful individual attempted to project a public image of self through an artistic commission. Such transactions constituted risks, as documented in a plethora of examples throughout history. The first part of this paper presents a new framework for considering portraits. The second part briefly considers Italian portraits that fit within the proposed categories.

Jonathan K. Nelson (PhD, Institute of Fine Arts), is Faculty Associate at Syracuse University Florence and Research Association at the Kennedy School of Harvard University. In 2004 he co-authored a monograph on Filippino Lippi, and co-curated a Botticelli and Filippino exhibition at the Palazzo Strozzi; he is currently working on a new monograph of Filippino, and an exhibition focusing on Marcello Guasti. He co-curated two exhibitions at the Galleria dell'Accademia -- dedicated to *Venus and Love. Michelangelo and the New Ideal of Beauty* (2002) and *Robert Mapplethorpe* (2009)—and when he was Assistant Director of Villa I Tatti, he created two online exhibitions about Bernard Berenson (2012, 2015). Other books include *Leonardo e la reinvenzione*

della figura femminile, (2007) and, with Richard J. Zeckhauser, *The Patron's Payoff: Economic Frameworks for Conspicuous Commissions in Renaissance Italy* (2008). Their current research project focuses on the risks that early modern Italian art held for artists, patrons, and observers.

James Pilgrim (Johns Hopkins University)

Discontented Classicism: Francesco Berni and Polidoro da Caravaggio

In his study of the Sack of Rome, André Chastel described the scenes from ancient history and pagan mythology painted by Polidoro da Caravaggio on the facades of Roman palaces in the early 1520s as "veritable manifestos on behalf of Rome." Like many works produced during the Medici pontificates, Polidoro's frescoes—today known mostly through drawings and prints by later artists—are generally thought to have appropriated the subject matter and style of the city's imperial past in order to emphasize the grandeur of the city's papal present, but the episodes they represent are also notably violent, rapacious, and idolatrous. This paper will suggest that the image of the classical past presented by Polidoro's early work was much less celebratory than has been recognized, and that he developed his more ambivalent point of view during an early association with the iconoclastic poet Francesco Berni, an outspoken critic of the slavish aping of antiquity whose service in the household of Cardinal Bibbiena coincided with the artist's involvement in the decoration of Bibbiena's Vatican apartments. Considering Polidoro's violent and idolatrous images of ancient history and mythology in relation to the humanist self-criticism exemplified by Berni's Erasmian *Dialogue Against the Poets*, the paper argues that the artist's early embrace of antiquity was anything but uncritical.

James Pilgrim received his BA from Colby College and his MA from Williams College. He is currently a graduate student in the Department of the History of Art at Johns Hopkins University and a Paul Mellon predoctoral fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (CASVA) at the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Maddalena Spagnolo (Università degli Studi di Napoli "Federico II")

The Reception of Bad Reception: Limits and Challenges of the *Quellenforschung*

This paper investigates the methodological issues in the *Quellenforschung* of bad reception of works of art in early modern Italy. It is based on a research started years ago on the production of sonnets mocking public works of art, which showed that many such texts belonged to a specific literary genre, partly indebted with both the *poesia burlesca* and the pasquinades. As with the pasquinades, these poems were often posted on the very work of art that they aimed to mock. In some cases, they were considered illegal, as were the pasquinades or any other text that undermined an individual's honour. Furthermore, they could serve as instruments for expressing personal, political or social aims, since works of art displayed in an important public context often had to accomplish tasks beyond the merely aesthetic one. This perspective provides a framework for understanding why the "official" *Kunstliteratur* of the 16th and the 17th century, which aimed to promote a new social status for artists as *virii illustri*, often excluded reference to ephemeral texts mocking works of art, or underestimated their value. By considering both the discrepancies between these manuscript sources and published art literature, as well as the problem of the supposed reliability of both these sources, the texts written to mock works of art can challenge our approach and methods to the study of artistic reception in early modern time.

Maddalena Spagnolo is a Lecturer at Università Federico II Naples, and previously worked at the Università di Siena. She obtained her PhD from the Università di Pisa in 2003, and is the recipient of grants and fellowships from the Warburg Institute, the British Academy-Accademia dei Lincei, Columbia University's Italian Academy for Advanced Studies, Villa I Tatti, the Bibliotheca Hertziana, and at the Kunsthistorisches Institut. Her research interests revolve around art criticism of the early modern period, with a focus on the history of the reception of works of art. She has published a book and several articles on Correggio, Vasari, and the *Kunstliteratur* of the 16th and 17th century. Since 2006, she has published extensively on "expressing disapproval of art", including an article in the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* in 2011. Currently she is at work on the "bad reception" of Palazzo Bartolini Salimbeni and a has just finished a book manuscript on Pasquino.