The French Renaissance in prints [Review]

Patricia Emison

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholars.unh.edu/art_facpub

Part of the Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture Commons

Recommended Citation

https://scholars.unh.edu/art_facpub/49
The French Renaissance in Prints, from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. by Karen Jacobson
Review by: Patricia Emison
Published by: The University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Renaissance Society of America
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2863008
Accessed: 21/02/2013 10:45

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.
Petrus Christus lived until 1475 or 1476. While several other Bruges painters are prominent in the archives of the period, scholars have not yet isolated their works by name. Hans Memling, who became a citizen of Bruges in 1465, and who signed his name and dated several of his own works, is the next major Bruges artist.

Ainsworth's basic chapter on Christus deals with the historiography of Christus scholarship and the documentary evidence of signed and dated works, seven of which are valuable as such, especially since no proven documents of commission or payment for Christus's paintings survive. Ainsworth follows with an analysis of the artist's painting technique and chronology, devoting considerable space to the comparison of underdrawing techniques by Petrus Christus.

These criteria tend to be confusing. The discussion of the Lamentation in Paris, for instance (not in the exhibition), first acknowledges the apparent authenticity of the underdrawing of figures and faces, then finds the faces in paint uncharacteristic of the artist, though these follow the underdrawing closely. Meanwhile no discussion ensues on the poor condition of the entire paint surface or repainting of the Paris work which is distinctly evident, even in the reproduction. Comparison of the Lamentation with the Death of the Virgin, cat. 15, in the Timken Art Gallery, San Diego, presents some distinct affinities in painted drapery style, faces, and landscape, despite the erosion and size differences between the two works.

The computer-assembled reflectographic images were difficult to read in originals at the exhibition and are much more so in the text. Further, the assertions of technique that seem to derive from them seem based on far too few comparisons for this reader to feel secure about the conclusions drawn. This analysis continues to represent specialized knowledge about which the lay viewer is advised rather than actively engaged.

In the Friedsam Annunciation, for instance, the reader is invited to compare the underdrawing of the Virgin's garments with that of the Virgin's garments in the Frankfurt Madonna and Saints (figs. 132, 142, 145). Not only is the comparison inconclusive when the images are confronted, but the styles of drapery in the two paintings are so different as to increase doubts as to the common source.

The Friedsam Annunciation is in general an ongoing problem, presented here as "attributed to Christus" with many arguments for the attribution. Unconvinced, this writer has no reasonable alternative to present for an attribution but can only note the work's affinity with the several magnificent paintings displayed as "School of van Eyck" or even "Hubert van Eyck" in the world's museums.

CHARLES I. MINOTT
University of Pennsylvania


For too long the French Renaissance has fallen between two schools: its Italianate character (and Italian personnel) let the northernists off the hook, yet clearly the French Renaissance was not a simple extension of the Italian (one need only look at St. Eustache in Paris), and so the Italianists neglected the work too. 1995 provided the needed stimulus with exhibitions of prints, drawings, and illustrated books. The ample and
beautiful exhibition catalogue under
review here is more than just a record
of one of those exhibitions, co-orga-
nized by the Grunwald Center for the
Graphic Arts at UCLA and the
Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. As the
Renaissance is increasingly redefined as
part of the early modern period, and
the revival of antiquity is accordingly
made to compete for scholarly attention
with issues such as the rise of national
cultural identities, The French Renais-
sance in Prints will stand out as a valu-
able resource for scholars of various
persuasions and diverse concentrations.

Henri Zerner’s book on Fontainebleau prints appeared twenty-six years
ago. Here he provides the introduction,
followed by “Printmakers in Sixteenth-
Century France,” by Marianne Grivel,
formerly of the Bibliothèque Nationale.
She discusses the documentary record as
it informs us about production and con-
sumption. Marie Fontaine wrote “Sto-
ries Beyond Words,” covering new
ground on the interaction of poetic and
visual imagination, including an excur-
sus on Barthélemy Aneau’s L’imagi-
nation poétique of 1552 in which poems
were written expressly to gloss woodcut
illustrations (oddly, none is illustrated).
Suzanne Boorsch on “The Prints of the
School of Fontainebleau,” tries to pin
down the identities of Master IV, Anto-
nio Fantuzzi (the conflation with Anto-
nio da Trento is dismissed without dis-
cussion in the thumbnail biographies at
the back), Leon Davent, and Jean Mignon.
Nancy Vickers, in “Courting the Female Subject,” expands upon her es-
say of 1986, “The Mistress in the Mas-
terpiece,” in The Poetics of Gender, giv-
ing a close analysis of Cellini’s fraught
relationships with his French model
Caterina and with Francois I’s mistress,
the Duchess d’Estampes. Philip Bene-
dict in “Of Marmites and Martyrs, Im-
ages and Polemic in the Wars of Reli-
gion,” complements Keith Moxey’s and
others’ studies of German pamphlet
and broadsheet imagery of the Refor-
mation, dealing in particular with the
period of the Catholic League in the
1580s and with woodcut imagery,
much of it anonymous. Cynthia
Burlingham of the Grunwald Center
in “Portraiture as Propaganda,
Printmaking during the Reign of
Henri IV,” brings the scope of the ex-
hibition into the seventeenth century.
Peter Fuhring discusses grotesques,
terms, moresques, strapwork, and
other essentials of ornament at
Fontainebleau and beyond in “French
Ornament Prints.”

As Zerner notes, the exhibition
was not conceived of as “Duvet to
Bellange,” that is, as a succession of
master or nearly master printmakers.
Instead a happily melded diversity of
methodological approaches in the es-
says yields a new, more inclusive pic-
ture of French Renaissance print-
making, one which extends chronolog-
ically and geographically, not to men-
tion artistically, beyond Fontaine-
bleau; assigns a significant part to
woodcut even apart from book illus-
tration; and deftly avoids terminologi-
cal straight jackets in handling a body
of prints that has long been dismissed
as falling short of the standard of
peintre-graveur, being often poorly
printed and by any reasonable defini-
tion not “original” prints. The authors
are in general comfortable with treat-
ing the print tradition in France with
respect even when labelling it craft or
the ancestor of the cartoon; indeed
they welcome the chance to deal with
popular imagery alongside that which
is not. The book is a treasure, and also
an open door, as the paucity and aged-
ness of many of the bibliographical
references makes clear. Two quibbles
may nevertheless be mentioned: the
index is rudimentary, and the authors
of the catalogue entries are at times
hard to identify (see the Contents for authors' names). The entries are nevertheless substantial. For instance, Pierre Milan is now given the *Mars and Venus* after Rosso, instead of Caraglio.

PATRICIA EMISON
University of New Hampshire


This book, the best complete survey of the life and works of Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), first appeared in Italian in 1985 and is now made available to English-speaking readers through Tim Carter's graceful translation. The new edition is valuable for other reasons as well. As Carter points out in his foreword, Fabbri revised his text in 1988-89, incorporating new research. Thus, for example, chapter 30, which narrates the composer's life from 1628 to 1632, now summarizes findings that precisely date the aging composer's entry into the priesthood in 1631 and 1632 (226). Another change is the elimination of the "Catalogo delle opere" of the original in favor of an "Index of Monteverdi's works" (323-336), an easier-to-read alphabetical listing that is also keyed to a more detailed catalogue published by Manfred Stattkus the same year as Fabbri's book. Finally, twelve pages of half-tone plates have been suppressed, as well as much of the discussion of the music. The former, no doubt an economic decision, is no great loss; the latter is a less happy change. The author, Carter writes, did so himself, "given that it was designed for a specific Italian readership" (xi). Still, one wonders from which side of the Alps the idea originated. Those Anglo-American readers with a penchant for more severe musical analysis may find Fabbri's treatment too empirical, too descriptive for their tastes. Others, however, might find it useful, as this reader did. Just as importantly, non-specialist readers with basic musical skills, to whom this book is also addressed, would find his work here invaluable.

*Monteverdi* is cast in three parts, which correspond to the cities in which the composer resided. Chapters 1-6 treat his youth and apprenticeship in his native Cremona, chapters 7-21 his years of service to the Gonzaga in Mantua from 1590 to 1612, and chapters 22-40 his service as *maestro di cappella* of S. Marco in Venice. Each part consists of chapters of biography alternating with analysis devoted to Monteverdi's music. The former are distinguished by straightforward narration, rich detail, and generous selections from the composer's letters. The musical chapters, despite the cuts mentioned above, are useful nonetheless. The contents of each madrigal book or sacred collection are listed in detail, together with all known authors of poetic texts; the libretti of stage works are accorded similarly careful treatment. Fabbri also offers a sensitive reconstruction of each work's historical context, providing information on such questions as patronage and liturgy. Finally, Monteverdi the controversialist, in his enormously important disagreement with the conservative theorist Giovanni Maria Artusi, is given first-rate coverage in chapter 10 (34-52).

A final word on this otherwise splendid book is in order. After explaining Fabbri's decision to cut most of his musical discussion, Carter adds that "present readers can find ample material in the rich bibliography in English on the composer" (xi). Perhaps so, but not from this bibliography alone. "Works cited" (312322) is an impressive list, but it omits the two most important monographs in Eng-