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Creighton E. Gilbert, *Italian Art 1400-1500.* Englewood Cliffs (N.J.), Prentice-Hall, 1980 (Sources and Documents in the History of Art Series). 226 + xxvii pp., 1 illus., 11,95 $

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Découvrir la revue

Citer ce compte rendu

(entre autres) qui auraient mérité leur place dans ce qui est décrit comme « the new generation of the School of Paris » (p. 26), sont absents.

En ce qui concerne l'art actuel et les « nouvelles formes » d'art depuis le milieu des années 60, l'éventail excessivement restreint des œuvres montre le peu d'intérêt que les responsables du musée y ont porté. Trois acquisitions, considérées comme majeures, illustrent les démarches de Boltanski, Darboven, Gilbert and George au cours des années 70. Ainsi, à part quelques œuvres héritées de donateurs et décrites comme « curiosités » (W. Orpen, L. Simon, Zuloaga, A. André, Capon, Georg, Krohg, etc.) par opposition aux grands « maîtres » des avant-gardes européennes, en dépit aussi du fait que certaines œuvres sont décrites comme « inclassables » (Chagall, Rousseau, Klee!) ou curieusement identifiées (V. Brauner comme « néo-dada »), il n'en demeure pas moins que l'AIC, de même que les généreux donateurs de Chicago, ont opté pour des « valeurs sûres », conservatrices, plutôt que des « valeurs » à risque même limité (pour parler en termes de marché). Souvent, il faut le constater, un grand nom a préséance sur la dimension de rupture historique engagée par certaines œuvres. Pour preuve, je ne peux que citer Speyer commentant une œuvre de Picasso de 1921, « Mother and Child » : « a noble, neoclassical composition with overwhelming interest in the volumetric figure » (p. 17).

Le catalogue des œuvres proprement dit (p. 30-78) fournit les indications suivantes pour chacune des œuvres : numéro d'entrée sur la fiche visuelle, nom de l'artiste, nationalité, dates (naissance, décès), titre de l'œuvre, date, médium, dimensions (pouces et centimètres), inscriptions (signature et date), provenance, date et numéro d'acquisition.

En fin d'analyse, cette publication, au niveau de la documentation visuelle, constitue une innovation intéressante et comporte des avantages nombreux : le format et l'épaisseur limités du volume en font un outil facile et pratique à la consultation ; la miniaturisation des reproductions (1 cm × 1 cm : on mentionne qu'elles sont mieux

vues sur une table lumineuse munie d'une lentille 20-24x) permet la conjonction d'un grand nombre d'images couleur sur un espace réduit ; la qualité des reproductions concurrence valablement les illustrations imprimées des livres d'art auxquels nous sommes habitués. Le code classificatoire permet aussi un repérage rapide au niveau des informations textuelles. Une contradiction néanmoins surgit de ce type de système documentaire : à la façon du livre ou du catalogue illustré, l'information se prête davantage à une consultation individuelle (contrairement à la diapositive 35 mm qui sert volontiers d'outil pédagogique), alors que le prix de 60,00 $ US est, quant à lui, plutôt prohibitif à l'acquisition individuelle.

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CREIGHTON E. GILBERT *Italian Art 1400-1500*. Englewood Cliffs (N.J.), Prentice-Hall, 1980 (Sources and Documents in the History of Art Series). 226 + xxvii pp., 1 illus., 11,95 $.

Documents are essential tools for the study of the history of art, and this volume of sources and documents on Renaissance art offers much valuable material to the student unable to work in the original languages. About half of Creighton Gilbert's selected texts are by artists with the remaining selections by patrons and commentators on art. These are subdivided into seven sections, each arranged in roughly chronological order. Brief comments introduce each selection and develop themes laid out in the introduction.

The first two sections, 'The Artist Speaking Informally' and 'The Artist in Formal Records,' contain a wealth of information on the working conditions of Renaissance artists. Relationships among artists are at times difficult (Ghiberti complains of his co-workers, Mantegna reacts angrily to engravings based on his designs) and at times beneficial (Jacopo Bellini enters into a

partnership agreement, apprentices are taken on, assistants prepare and execute works). We find out about the financial positions of artists from Donatello's *catasto* declaration, Verrocchio's will and a list of Benedetto da Maiano's worldly goods and properties (including an impressive number of books). Relationships between artists and patrons are documented: contracts are drawn, materials and scaffolding supplied and instructions given (or not given) by the commissioners. Financial matters emerge as a prime concern, as Fra Filippo Lippi asks Giovanni di Cosimo de'Medici for money, Francesco del Cossa wants better pay, Mantegna needs money because of his debts, and the price of the pulpit of S. Maria Novella is arbitrated.

Finding contracts 'immensely repetitious,' Gilbert includes only two examples in these first two sections, and refers his reader to D.S. Chambers' collection of texts about patronage with its numerous contracts for variants (*Artists and Patrons in the Italian Renaissance*, Columbia, S.C., 1971). While Renaissance contracts do share many common forms, phrases and legal stipulations, they also contain valuable clues to the attitudes and expectations of both artist and patron, the evolution of works of art, and the working procedures of artists. Other studies, not cited by Gilbert, make clear the significance of a close analysis of stipulations found in contracts regarding subject matter, the nature and quality of materials, the amount of time required of a master (as distinguished from his assistants), time limits, determination of price and method of payment. (One of the most important of these is Hannelore Glasser's *Artists' Contracts of the Early Renaissance*, New York, 1977.)

In the third section of Gilbert's collection, 'The Artist as Book Author,' the increasingly self-confident, educated artist of the Renaissance emerges, particularly in the selections from Leon Battista Alberti and Lorenzo Ghiberti. Almost the whole of Alberti's treatise *On Painting*, which was so important to Quattrocento art theory and practice, is translated. Unfortunately, Gilbert does not indicate whether he translates from the Italian or Latin text, an important

point given the complexities of translating Alberti and the significant differences between the texts. Ghiberti's historical account of Trecento artists reveals the self-consciousness of the Renaissance artist as the heir to a great tradition, while his autobiographical account speaks to his high self-esteem as much more than a mere craftsman. The other selections, from Filarete, Piero della Francesca, Giovanni Santi and the 'Milanese Perspectivist,' round out this section with comments on the figurative arts, antique and contemporary artists and works of art, and perspective. These works reveal the new interests of fifteenth-century artists. A reference to more traditional texts, such as Cennino Cennini's *Il Libro dell'arte,* written about 1400, with its wealth of material on techniques and the training and status of artists, would have served to put Gilbert's selections in perspective and indicated matters which continued to be relevant through the fifteenth century.

Section Four, 'The Patron Speaking,' picks up on many themes found in the first two sections, and these selections could well have been editorially linked more closely to those sections. Here we find material on the patron's appreciation of works of art and further evidence of his interaction with the artist. Giovanni Rucellai admires the monuments of Rome and notes that the works he owns are by 'the best masters who have existed for a good while back,' and Piero de'Medici shows great pleasure in acquiring a Cimabue. The educated patron of the Quattrocento reveals himself as Giovanni de'Medici looks for a tapestry, the Marquis of Mantua searches for depictions of cities, and the Duke of Ferrara finds a new court painter. Lorenzo de'Medici, famous as a collector of antique gems and *objets d'art* and known as an authority on art, is asked to judge competing models for the Forteguerri Monument. While artists continued to be regarded essentially as craftsmen well into the sixteenth century, patrons often showed deference to them, as in the case of Mantegna's treatment as a courtier as well as a craftsman at Mantua.

Gilbert's patron is primarily concerned with measurements, the quality of materials used and the specification of the subject of a work and leaves the actual devising of the image to the artist. While this was frequently the case, there is ample evidence in other contracts and letters that the patron was often quite concerned with the content of a work. Glasser has pointed out that *disegni* or *modelli* were often submitted for approval by the patron, and the artist required to execute the work exactly as indicated in the drawing or model. Patrons frequently stipulated that paintings 'be made in the manner and form of' an extant work. Michael Baxandall (in the first chapter of his *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy,* Oxford, 1972) has also pointed out important changes of emphasis in contracts during the Quattrocento: to a greater interest in the skill of the artist over preciousness of materials and in execution by the master as distinguished from his assistants.

In the last three sections, Gilbert turns to religious and secular commentaries to explore how fifteenth-century people looked at art. The clergy appear as a generally conservative force, giving instructions on the use of art to educate young children, suggesting virtuous examples to be taken from paintings, describing some of the church treasures, and – in the case of Savonarola – condemning unchaste art.

The 'Literary People' and 'Diarists and Chroniclers' (a fuzzy distinction) shed interesting light on contemporary appreciation of art and artists. Bartolomeo Facio, a court writer in Naples, cites naturalism as a criterion of superiority in painting and calls painting a 'silent poem.' The transitional status of painting in the Quattrocento emerges once again in Facio's text when he calls it an art of great genius yet still places it within the manual arts, a view echoed by Michele Savonarola who does acknowledge the new importance of mathematics to art. The pride felt in local artists is evident in texts by Alamanno Rinuccini, Cristoforo Landino, Ugolino Verino, and Antonio Manetti. Gilbert cites a lack of lengthy discussion about art and artists in the *Commentaries* of Pope Pius II as evidence of a lack of a strong interest in art. While Gilbert's book does not deal with architecture, one should not forget that Pius II was closely involved in changes in Pienza's architecture, both the central piazza and housing. Finally, other writers report anecdotes about artists, describe the sights of various cities and discuss their interests in antique monuments.

On occasion, scholars were involved in the development of works of art, and Gilbert cites several such programs. He includes Leonardo Bruni's proposal for the second set of Baptistery doors by Lorenzo Ghiberti, which in the event was not used. Ghiberti, in his *Commentaries,* claims that the authorities gave him 'permission to carry it out in the way I thought would turn out most perfectly and most richly and most elaborately.' Gilbert accepts that Ghiberti probably had control over the program, but Richard Krautheimer has pointed out how unlikely this is: '... if Ghiberti really drafted the final program, it is difficult to explain why, in describing the door in the *Commentarii,* he should be so indifferent to the narrative as to omit mention of some subjects, to introduce others by the wrong names and even to enumerate events that are simply not represented' *(Lorenzo Ghiberti,* with Trude Krautheimer-Hess, Princeton, 1970, I, 171). More likely, another scholar submitted the final program, and Ghiberti's creativity is expressed in the break from the established quatrefoil pattern and in the invention of the designs of the panels. Programs such as Bruni's may not be as rare as Gilbert supposes, since the evidence for the Doors of Paradise points to the probable existence of programs other than Bruni's (Krautheimer I, 159-61, 169-71).

This collection provides a valuable addition to the texts available in English translation to the student of Renaissance art. In general, Gilbert's translations are quite readable, and his introductory comments perceptive. But ultimately the book's value is diminished by its lack of editorial depth. The significance of these collected texts cannot be understood without more exhaustive commentary. At the very least, the reader should be given far more extensive bibliographic references. (Gilbert cites only the publication of the texts in their original

languages.) Surely, references to books such as Peter Burke's *Culture and Society in Renaissance Italy* (London, 1972), Michael Baxandall's *Painting and Experience* (cited above), or Martin Wackernagel's *Der Lebensraum des Künstlers in der florentinischen Renaissance* (Leipzig, 1938, now available in a new English translation by Alison Luchs as *The World of the Florentine Renaissance Artist*, Princeton, 1981) are fundamental to a collection of sources and documents of Renaissance art. The need for such secondary material in the case of individual texts has already been commented upon, and I will only add two more cases. Is it really enough to refer the reader of Alberti's *On Painting* to the works of Masaccio and other Renaissance artists and to Kenneth Clark's 1944 edition, for further information? Or to mention Cecil Gray's highly regarded, annotated translation of *De Pictura* only as the place of publication of the Latin text? How much more meaning do all the individual references to the Medici have when viewed within the context of the studies by Wackernagel, Chastel (*Art et humanisme à Florence au temps de Laurent le Magnifique*, 2nd ed., Paris, 1961), and Gombrich ('The Early Medici as Patrons of Art: A Survey of Primary Sources,' reprinted in *Norm and Form*, London, 1966, 35-57)? Given the wealth of material in Gilbert's selected texts, it is indeed unfortunate not to have proper support for the interpretation of that information.

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JOHN SUMMERSON *The Life and Work of John Nash, Architect.* Cambridge, (Mass.), The MIT Press, 1980. 217 pp., 48 illus., 35,00 $.

In 1806 John Nash, then 54 years old, was appointed Architect to the Department of Woods and Forests of Great Britain. At an age when many men are considering the conclusion of their careers, Nash embarked on the most brilliant and most controversial portion of his. In fact it could be said that this was Nash's third architectural practice, for he had already been through two distinct periods. These earlier experiences prepared the eclectic, spirited man for his important Regency work.

John Nash was born in 1752 to Welsh parents. His father, 'an engineer and millwright in Lambeth' (p. 1) died when John was six or seven. A few years later the young boy was indentured in London to Sir Robert Taylor, a sculptor turned architect, who achieved considerable fame and became architect to the Bank of England. Nash's activities upon leaving Taylor – probably after the customary seven-year indenture period – are not known in any detail. It appears that he was briefly married and, more importantly, undertook the building of eight houses in Bloomsbury, a precocious move. Presaging his mature style, the houses fronting on Bloomsbury Square parade eight Corinthian pilasters above an arched and rusticated ground floor. While an architectural success, this venture was a financial failure for Nash was unable to sell these houses for some number of years. In 1783 he was declared bankrupt, an event which closed the London development world to him, effectively ending his first career.

This unusual man, who described his own appearance as a 'thick, squat, dwarf figure, with round head, snub nose and little eyes' (Ann Saunders, *Regent's Park*, 1969, p. 79), was far from beaten. Beyond his physiognomy, he could be characterized as one who delighted in large-scale, complex projects that called upon his considerable capabilities for persuasion, intrigue and financial manœuvering. He had a genius for the broad effect and little patience for rules and regulations. These traits were now required as Nash, penniless, went to Wales to re-establish himself in business. By 1789 he was employed as architect for the Carmarthen gaol. Other commissions soon followed for he made himself agreeable to the local Welsh squires; an elegant woman, much later, was to call him 'a very clever, odd, amusing man' (p. 13). For Nash, 1796 brought an important break-through: that year he was hired to enlarge the house of Paul Cobb Methuen of Corsham

Court in Wiltshire. At the same time Methuen engaged the leading practitioner of landscape art, Humphry Repton. From this exercise there emerged a partnership lasting for four or five years, from which Nash emerged with decisive gains. Central to this union was a belief in the Picturesque, as defined by Uvedale Price and Payne Knight. While Repton's example of Picturesque methods was important to Nash, so was his clientele; as the colleague of Repton, Nash was hired by many well placed patrons to which he would not, otherwise, have had entrée. In this category is Nash's work for H.R.H. the Prince of Wales at his seaside resort at Brighton. According to contemporary tales Nash's ties with the Prince were furthered by the architect's marriage, in 1798, to a woman 21 years his junior, Mary Anne Bradley, who was reputed to be the Prince Regent's mistress. In 1811 the Regent was particularly stirred by Nash's Picturesque plan for Marylebone Park, subsequently renamed Regent's Park. With this commission begins Nash's third and most noteworthy career.

The development of the Park entailed the creation of a new thoroughfare, for royal processions from the Park at the southern end to Carleton House in Pall Mall, to the north of the capital. This became Regent Street. Arcaded like the Rue de Rivoli in Paris, this 'bending street,' along with the Park, was to occupy Nash for the next twelve years. He was 'architect, surveyor, valuer, estate agent, engineer and financial advisor' (p. 88), although he himself did not undertake all the new building required. Both Samuel Baxter, who created Oxford Circus, and James Burton, who build one quarter of the houses in the street, all behind facades designed or approved by Nash, made important contributions.

While engaged in work on the Park and the Street, Nash was also active in a myriad of other important projects, including improvements at Windsor to Cumberland Lodge and Royal Lodge, at Carleton House, and at the Royal Pavilion, Brighton, all for the Regent. He was also remodelling his own