

**Jill Dunkerton, Susan Foister, Dillian Gordon and Nicholas Penny, *Giotto to Durer. Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, in association with National Gallery Publications, 1991, 408 pp., \$55 US**

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painting is dead!" is an enticing indication of the manner in which the medium was addressed within the fine-art establishment, discussions of the impact of photography have been evaluated, almost exclusively, from the viewpoint of the scientific establishment. We need to know more about the attitudes of the Royal Academy and the Académie des Beaux-Arts to place the impact of photography in a better perspective. Currently, Dr. Schaaf is working on the collection of thousands of letters held at Lacock to and from Talbot. The information from these letters will shed much more light on the period primarily addressed in this book. Although the story is primarily Talbot's and Herschel's, that of their experiments and collaboration, a wider perspective will only serve to strengthen the account of the invention and early progress of photography.

The story that Schaaf tells entices the reader and, like all good books, raises many questions. Several of these are the result of the perspective given by the scope and limitations of the material Schaaf has so effectively employed. The period from 1841 until the first issue of *The Pencil of Nature* is briefly covered, and it is to be hoped that sufficient archival material survives for a similarly detailed publication on this crucial period in the progress of photography. Other questions may never be answered. For instance, why

did Talbot not attempt to visit Daguerre or at least travel to Paris to examine his process? Is this again a reflection of Talbot's character, or was there a *bona fide* reason? How much can we learn about the critical events in the progress of photography in Great Britain between 1841, the announcement of the Calotype, and the publication of *The Pencil of Nature*? Will extant archival material help us to build a clearer picture of the history of European photography during the 1840s? And why has no major scholarly study on Daguerre appeared since the Gernsheims' seminal volume published thirty-six years ago?

This book is a major work which will further enhance Dr. Schaaf's already formidable reputation as one of the leading photographic historians of his generation. Much of its impact and effectiveness is due to the generosity of Manfred Heiting, who covered the costs of the lavish illustrations, produced using several duotone and colour-colour printing processes on a paper similar in surface to that employed by Herschel and Talbot. While the continued publication of his research is eagerly awaited, one hopes that his scholarship will stimulate others to follow his lead and head for the archives!

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JILL DUNKERTON, SUSAN FOISTER, DILLIAN GORDON AND NICHOLAS PENNY, *Giotto to Durer. Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, in association with National Gallery Publications, 1991, 408 pp., \$55 US.

The Sainsbury Wing, an extension of the National Gallery on the northwest corner of Trafalgar Square in London, is the new home of one of the world's finest collections of Early Renaissance paintings. *Giotto to Durer* was published to coincide with the opening of the extension in 1991. All of the authors are affiliated with the National Gallery as curators or restorers of the Early Renaissance collection, and their intimate knowledge of the objects is very much in evidence in this volume. Their book marks a new direction in the publishing history of the National Gallery (presumably because of the association with Yale University Press), in that it united some of the best characteristics of the Gallery's other publications, such as the first-rate catalogues of the permanent holdings,<sup>1</sup> or the excellent series *Art in the Making*, which focuses on the materials and techniques of selected paintings in the collection.<sup>2</sup> The book is clearly designed to appeal to a general audience, although it will

be of value to the specialist as well. As I discovered last year, it was an invaluable tool for undergraduate teaching, despite several shortcomings to be discussed below.

The book is divided into three main sections. Part One provides a general historical introduction to Early Renaissance society. The authors maintain the traditional dichotomy between sacred and profane in two chapters on "Christian Worship and Imagery" and "Civic, Dynastic and Domestic Art." A brief discussion of the structure of the Western Church is outlined on pp. 18-20, serving as an important preface for the subsequent discussions of altars, saints, relics and the relationship that existed between devotional practices, religious images and altarpieces during this period. This section proved to be particularly useful in teaching undergraduates, many of whom seem to have very little sense of what the Christian tradition represents for past societies. As the discussion is tied in almost exclusively with the objects in the collection, the information on devotional practises, religious orders and confraternities in different parts of Europe is of necessity restricted; however, the lavish colour plates are at least placed in close proximity to the text, making this a readable, well-illustrated account for students to follow. The exclusion of mural

painting or manuscript illumination from the discussion, acknowledged by the authors in the preface, is evident throughout the first section of the book.

The most impressive aspect of the volume is Part Two, which is entitled "The Making of Paintings." The authors present a clear, straightforward discussion of the status of the artist during the Renaissance, touching on problems such as guild structure in both the North and South, and how contracts and commissions were handled by patrons and artists. The chapter on workshop structure and organization provides broad coverage of a complex topic. There is even a short, introductory discussion of Renaissance art theory on pp. 205-10, entitled "Painting and the Sister Arts." As the authors do attempt to integrate North and South in this section and make some mention of painting in relation to sculpture, I was surprised to discover that they did not cite Baxandall's text on limewood sculpture in the bibliographic entries for this section, let alone take note of his findings (pp. 398-99). He, more than any other Renaissance scholar to date, has drawn attention to the importance of culturally determined languages of art, as well as highlighting the necessity of viewing art of the past as an "excursion into alien sensibilities."<sup>3</sup> This section seemed the most dispensable, especially as it failed to take note of the interesting re-evaluations of these matters by scholars in recent years.<sup>4</sup>

The authors clearly feel most comfortable when they can discuss the art object. For example, their succinct discussion of the change from pattern-book drawings to the loose, compositional sketches of Raphael will be particularly useful for students coming to grips with the development of this medium during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

The next chapter of the book, entitled "Techniques," describes and illustrates in vivid detail the processes of painting during the Renaissance. The authors draw on recent research from the restoration laboratories at the Gallery to take the reader through every step of preparing to paint, whether it be panel, canvas or glue-size painting. The many details showing the fronts and backs of panels in raking light, SEM micrographs of gesso and gilding that illustrate the section on the preparatory stages of painting, and the infra-red reflectograms of changes in pictorial composition, help to make the hidden life of these works of art spring into view. The development of oil painting in both the North and South receives very balanced treatment here.

Much is made of the new hanging of the collection in the authors' preface to the book. Unlike the former physical separation of Northern and Southern paintings in the main building, works of art of the same date are arranged

in adjacent spaces in the Sainsbury Wing. Masaccio and Lorenzo Monaco are now hung in close proximity to Campin, van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden; Antonello da Messina is near to Memlinc and Bouts; and the late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century Italian masters, such as Bellini, Cima da Conegliano and Raphael, are placed in close proximity to their Northern contemporaries, Gerard, David, Massys and Dürer. The hope is that the new hanging will lead to a re-evaluation of the development of painting in Northern and Southern Europe.

Which leads me to my observation about a major drawback in this account of Early Renaissance painting. It will seem churlish to point out what might have been in this book, when the reader has been presented with so much that should be there. In my view, this volume should have included an account of the history of the collection, to provide a much-needed perspective as to how it came into being.<sup>5</sup> Surely, if the overall theme of the book is to provide a detailed historical context for the paintings in the Sainsbury wing, a discussion of the Gallery's acquisition policy, at seminal points in the history of the collection, should have been included in this volume. The story of how Early Renaissance works of art were at first viewed as "curiosities" in 1827, then later collected avidly by Sir Charles Eastlake, the Gallery's first Director, makes for important reading in the history of taste and art-historical scholarship.<sup>6</sup> For instance, the collection has peculiar limitations that should be explained. It includes nothing from Bohemia, very little from France and the Iberian peninsula, and the majority of the German paintings come from Cologne. In fact, the emphasis during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was very much on acquiring examples of Italian masters, and in particular, those from Tuscany. Under the entry for the panel by Margarito of Arezzo, we learn that Eastlake purchased this work in 1857 "solely for its historical importance," to show "the rude beginnings from which, through nearly two centuries and a half, Italian art slowly advanced to the period of Raphael and his contemporaries," without any further critical comment from the authors (p. 212). Many of the examples in the collection fall within the category of canonical masterpieces. We have an obligation to students to explain how value was and is ascribed by different members of the art establishment. Despite the new arrangement of the pictures, and the book's even-handed approach to developments in Renaissance painting north and south of the Alps, the general public is not made sufficiently aware of the reasons why and how the collection is so lopsided in emphasis. Whatever the limitations of the collection, we should at least be given the opportunity to view the works hanging here in a complete and accurate historical perspective.<sup>7</sup>

The final section of the book, Part Three, follows the more conventional format for a museum publication. The authors focus on a selection of 69 paintings from the Early Renaissance collection. These works are provided with detailed commentaries explaining dating, physical characteristics, as well as iconographic and stylistic factors. Virtually every entry is accompanied by lavish colour photographs, as well as clear black-and-white (or occasional colour) illustrations, which either reconstruct works that are now fragmentary or offer important comparative material. Again, everything is designed to facilitate the general reader's comprehension of a sometimes difficult and inaccessible period in the history of art. The book also contains much useful information for students, such as maps, a chronological table, a glossary, a list of systems of measurement and coinage and an extensive bibliography.

This volume will not prove to be the definitive book on Early Renaissance painting, but it will certainly form a new starting-point for a discussion of the continuities and disjunctions in European artistic practices. The technical section alone will make this essential reading in undergraduate courses. The authors and joint publishing houses are to

be congratulated on this useful and handsome contribution to Early Renaissance studies.

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- 1 For a complete list of the National Gallery's catalogues, see *Giotto to Durer*, 391.
- 2 For example, D. Bomford, J. Dunkerton, D. Gordon, A. Roy, *Art in the Making: Italian Painting Before 1400* (London, 1989).
- 3 As discussed by M. Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (Yale, 1980).
- 4 For a recent overview of this problem, see L. Silver, "The State of Research in Northern European Art of the Renaissance Era," *Art Bulletin*, XVIII (1986), 518-35.
- 5 For this I had to turn to M. Wilson, *A Short Guide to the Sainsbury Wing* (London, 1991), 28-32.
- 6 As recounted by D. Robertson, *Sir Charles Eastlake and the Victorian Art World* (Princeton, 1978). I am grateful to Carol Gibson-Wood for this reference.
- 7 For a recent re-appraisal of this problem by a group of historians, see R. Porter and M. Teich, eds., *The Renaissance in National Context* (Cambridge, 1992).

MICHAEL SNODIN, editor, *Karl Friedrich Schinkel: A Universal Man*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press in association with the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1991, 218 pp., cloth and paper editions.

The appearance of a major publication in English on Karl Friedrich Schinkel (1781-1841), widely considered the most influential German architect of the nineteenth century, is an important and welcome event. Traditionalists esteem him, and modernists have looked on him as a "pioneer of modern design" (though he was too early to figure in Nikolaus Pevsner's book of that name). Yet remarkably little has appeared on him in English, even despite a flurry of attention to him in the early 1980s at the bicentennial of his birth. A chapter in David Watkin's *German Architecture and the Classical Ideal* (London, 1987), an extended essay by Barry Bergdoll in the *Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* (vol. 3), and Hermann Pundt's now somewhat dated *Schinkel's Berlin* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972) are most of what we have, since he has never been the subject of a monograph in English. This new book is not one, either; instead, it is a book based on a major exhibition of his work, which includes a catalogue of the show and seven essays on aspects of his career. As a major addition to the literature on Schinkel, it raises high hopes, but the hopes are not entirely fulfilled.

The book and the exhibition (at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, in 1991) had considerable corporate sponsorship and were hailed as an example of the sort of cultural exchange now possible between Britain and the "new" Germany. The importance of Britain to Schinkel was noted — he visited in 1826 — and objects not seen outside Germany before, many practically inaccessible to Westerners until 1989, were exhibited. Accordingly, the book is large and impressive: less than an inch thick, but heavy, bound in a square format suitable for plates, and lavishly illustrated. The illustrations include superb ink-line drawings made by Schinkel as a basis for published engravings in editions of his work (*Sammlung Architektonischer Entwürfe*) and elsewhere, dozens of coloured drawings by him, painted views of his buildings (the best, those by Carl Daniel Freydanck), and photographs of the buildings and their interiors, most taken before World War Two, with its heavy destruction.

The catalogue, written by many hands, is generally informative and useful, and problems with the book lie mainly in the essays. The first, with the same title as the book, is by Peter Bethausen; it is an overview of Schinkel's career, character and reputation. An exceptionally talented youth, he could have turned his hand to almost any art, but for the accident in 1797 of seeing Friedrich Gilly's design for a temple-monument to Frederick the Great, which induced