Doni d'amore: Donne e rituali nel Rinascimento. Patricia Lurati, ed. Exh. Cat. Rancate (Svizzera): Pinacoteca Züst; Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2014. 240 pp. €30.

One tends to think of elite marriages in Renaissance Italy as tactical arrangements between members of noble families and mercantile houses, calculated to further mutual interests, solidify strategic alliances, and provide social or material gain for male relations. Indeed, the sequence of events that comprised Renaissance marriage (it was not a single event) — the engagement, the wedding, and the birth of an heir — all supported the transfer of property. Despite this business-minded approach to matrimony, these matches were not completely shorn of the ideal of love, whether the dream of truly romantic bonds between man and woman, or the perfection of feminine virtue in the virgin bride. The ceremonies of marriage were accompanied by the exchange of gifts; in elite society these were typically rare and precious objects rich in symbolic meanings.

These gifted objects provided the focus of an exhibition at the Pinacoteca cantonale Giovanni Züst in Rancate, Switzerland, for which the show's curator, Patricia Lurati, has edited seven essays to complement the catalogue and confront "a profound contradiction: the celebration of love when matrimonial unions consisted of practical negotiations, and the praise of female chastity when the real request of women was to give birth to as many sons as possible" (13). Gifts, then, are the true bridal veils: the props of ritualistic engagements, marriages, and childbirths. These three events provide the tripartite division of the volume, each opened by a short text by Lurati to provide a narrative between the show's works.

Lurati introduces the first topic, noting that arranging an engagement was not always straightforward. There was, though, the inducement that the husband-to-be would gift to his promised bride precious jewels and clothing some months before the scheduled wedding date. These objects, Lurati suggests, demonstrated the fiancée's acquiescence, as wearing her fiancé's gifts intimately connected her body with his property. This is well expressed in the exhibited belt clasp, part of a *cintura nuziale*, replete with miniature portraits of the betrothed, Costanzo Sforza and Camilla d'Aragona, and gifted for their engagement in 1474. Likewise, the associated iconography of other objects reflected this

bond. Cupid pierced their betrothed hearts; stories of Susannah and Isolde — represented in the exhibition with two sixteenth-century carved ivory combs — expressed the promised bride's continued chastity.

The theme of chastity is further elaborated in Jill Burke's essay "The Female Nude in Renaissance Life and Art." Surprisingly, the sex life of Renaissance married couples was rather drab. Nudity was considered a practicality of procreation, and couples even remained clothed while sleeping. This was despite the proliferation of female nudes in art, painted, Burke reminds us, from live models whose other employment was in the brothels of fifteenth-century Italy. This break between reality and an ideal of womanhood peaks in the theatricality of the wedding ceremony. After Lureti's helpful piece on Renaissance wedding planning, Roberta Bartoli's essay, "Banquets of Gold and Silver: A Wedding Table for a Fourteenth-Century Wedding," provides a thorough overview of the material paraphernalia required to sustain elaborate culinary spectacles, as embodied by a remarkable late fifteenth-century service of banqueting knives from Milan's Castello Sforzesco. As one expects, part 2 of the catalogue also features wedding chests and wedding rings; less expected are some items of women's clothing from the Museo del Tessuto in Prato.

Part 3 deals with childbirth. While interesting, the essays by Cristina Giorgetti, "The Cloths of Infancy, the Forgotten Time," and Tatiana Crivelli, "Fidelity, Maternity, Sanctity: Reinterpretations of Matrimonial Bonds in the Work of Vittoria Colonna," shift the focus away from a close study of the objects as presented thus far. Likewise, the exhibition shifts focus from three-dimensional pieces to figurative artworks of motherhood. Disappointingly, beyond the accoutrements of childcare, only a fine sixteenth-century baptismal swaddling-cloth pertains to the volume's strength in discussing the symbolic objects that represented the idealization of Renaissance nuptials.

This book, neither a definitive catalogue nor an exhaustive companion, does bring something new to the study of Renaissance material culture by fusing in-depth object descriptions with set-piece thematic essays, threaded together by Lurati's narrative interjections. Presented with good-quality images, a detailed bibliography, and a useful glossary, this catalogue-cum-companion should engage a specialist audience for its synthetic, if not quite synergic, approach to the material culture of engagement, marriage, and childbirth during the Italian Renaissance.

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