

Luca Trevisan, ed. *Renaissance Intarsia: Masterpieces of Wood Inlay*.
New York: Abbeville Press, 2012. 256 pp. \$125. ISBN: 978-0-7892-1126-2.

Renaissance Intarsia is a beautiful publication that traces the rise, triumph, and decline of the art of Italian wood inlay during the Quattrocento and Cinquecento. The richly illustrated and handsomely produced volume provides an excellent overview of an art form that flourished on the peninsula for well over a century. The book is divided into three parts and contains a total of eleven chapters. Multiple authors tell the story of ingenious woodworkers who collaborated with artists and architects, and who labored with assistants to create an astounding array of skillfully intarsiated choirstalls, sacristies, and *studioli*.

In his introduction, Luca Trevisan provides the rationale for the book's focus on the Quattrocento and Cinquecento, and explains the purpose as "to trace the *fil rouge* connecting the most significant moments in the history of Italian Renaissance intarsia" (23). Part 1 opens with Antonio Manetti and Agnolo di Lazzaro, who are credited with giving birth to perspectival intarsia with their work in the

Old Sacristy of the Florentine Cathedral between 1436 and 1445. These two masters introduced novel modes of representing three-dimensional space on a flat plane through the use of clear designs and carefully chosen wood types. Both worked in personal styles that laid the foundation for a new generation of masters who advanced intarsia to unprecedented levels of refinement, as is demonstrated throughout the book. Those masters included, for example, Cristoforo and Lorenzo Canozzi da Lendinara, and Lorenzo's son-in-law Pier Antonio degli Abate, who worked in Modena, Parma, and Reggio Emilia (the latter woodworker continued in Vicenza). Their intarsias dazzled the minds of contemporaries, and prompted a spirited description by the Sicilian monk Matteo Colazio, who stated that everything depicted in their intarsias was "realer than real" (68).

In part 2, no less than three chapters trace the work of the Olivetan monk Fra Giovanni da Verona. A gifted and prolific craftsman, Fra Giovanni (and assistants) produced ornately intarsiated church furnishings in Verona, Monte Oliveto, Siena, Naples, and Rome, roughly between 1494 and 1523. The authors show how Fra Giovanni's work matured to an astonishing level of sophistication culminating in his final commission for the Sacristy of Santa Maria in Organo in Verona, details of which are amply illustrated throughout the book.

From the second quarter of the sixteenth century, the nature of intarsia began to transform. In part 3, the chapter on the choir of the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore shows that intarsia began to imitate painting. For this choir, Lorenzo Lotto produced over seventy cartoons and drawings for Giovan Francesco Capoferri, a young woodworker who had been trained by Fra Damiano da Bergamo. Following the zenith of single-point perspective, Capoferri worked under the artistic influence of Lotto, and his intarsias marked a new beginning in the medium. A brilliant craftsman, his work closely relates in style and in execution to what became known as marquetry, or *Peinture en Bois*, but marked the decline of intarsia.

Notwithstanding the wealth of information that the book offers, there are some odd omissions, the most puzzling being the absence of Antonio di Neri Barili, the only *intarsiatore* ever to make a self-portrait (now lost, but recorded in a black-and-white photograph) that imparts vital information on the technique of the medium. A contemporary of Fra Giovanni da Verona, Barili worked his intarsiated wizardry in the Chapel of St. John the Baptist in the Siena Cathedral (preserved as a fragment in the church of the Collegiata in San Quirico d'Orcia and in private collections) during the time that the monk worked in the monastery Monte Oliveto Maggiore. Both Fra Giovanni and Barili made remarkable intarsiated references to the medium's technique (for Fra Giovanni see page 141), a subject that could have been explored in greater depth and accuracy than is offered in the final two pages of the book.

Renaissance Intarsia gives an excellent overview of an art form that blossomed in tandem with the development of single-point perspective, thrived for a century, and declined when intarsiated images began to imitate painting. The book's overall photography is exemplary, and the countless detailed illustrations beautifully enrich the text. While over the years many publications on intarsia have appeared, only several have taken a comprehensive approach, and very few have appeared in

English. *Renaissance Intarsia* definitely fills a void in the field, and will be a valuable resource to specialists from across disciplines. The high-quality production and the aesthetic quality of the art works will also give broad appeal to general audiences.

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