

Perfection: The Essence of Art and Architecture in Early Modern Europe.

Lorenzo Pericolo and Elisabeth Oy-Marra, eds.

Turnhout: Brepols, 2019. 336 pp. €135.

This handsome volume originated in four sessions at the Renaissance Society of America's Annual Meeting in Berlin in 2015. The thirteen contributors offer perspectives on a concept that might appear out of kilter with our times. What relevance do universalizing notions have? The editors are to be congratulated, however, for settling on a theme that is not only "vastly neglected" (3), as they note, but also protean and contestable. In his introduction, Pericolo begins with Balzac's *Le chef-d'oeuvre inconnu* (1831), in which Nicolas Poussin and the loosely fictional characters Porbus and Frenhofer engage the question of the artist's calling: whether to draw or to color, and how to balance them; whether to imitate nature or seize its living, breathing essence. Pericolo points to the novel's inspiration for Picasso, and to perfection as "unattainable beauty—that is, the most accomplished and appropriate figurative expression of an artistic vision" (16). He addresses perfection's long history, acknowledging, in citing Johann Joachim Winckelmann as a "radical example," that "as an aesthetic aspiration and regulatory principle, perfection may invoke—and even authorize—a notion of hierarchical order, cultural hegemony, and interpretive dogmatism that is extraneous or even repugnant to contemporary art history, and rightly so" (29).

Giorgio Vasari's *Vite* casts a long shadow, beginning with Benjamin Zweig's searching chapter "Measure, Number, and Weight: Perfection in Medieval Art and Thought," in which Vasari's model of the past was antithetical. Medieval definitions owed more to theological precepts and creation imagery than to artistic practice. Following an analysis of Titian's ravishing San Salvador *Annunciation*, Valeska von Rosen ("Perfection as Rhetorical *Techne* and Aesthetic Ideal in the Renaissance Discourse on Art") suggests that early Renaissance theory centered on perfection's rhetorical and technical identity and, too, that beauty—too simplistically yoked to perfection—possessed its own meaning. For Dario Donetti ("Crafting Perfection: Leon Battista Alberti, Language, and the Art of Building"), Alberti's aims were practical and empirical, wherein he described perfection with down-to-earth similes congenial to the building site and a mastery of craft. Shira Brisman ("The Palindromic Logic of Dürer's Double-Sided Gift") sensitively meditates on Vasari's story of Dürer's gift to Raphael of a self-portrait on cambric, an object that was transparent, emitting light and bound inseparably to divine likeness. The artist also wittily traced figures front to back, privileging process and his sovereign, infinite invention.

Victor I. Stoichita ("Michelangelo and *La Cosa Mirabile*") examines the *Risen Christ* and the Vatican *Pietà*, outlining a dialectic of transformation that, on the one hand, exhibited bodily resurrection and, on the other, dead form that yet lives. Stuart Lingo ("Bronzino's Beauty") brilliantly distinguishes between Vasari's ideals of beauty and perfection. Whereas the author was parsimonious in attributing perfection, he was

surprisingly generous about Bronzino's beauty; the artist bursts forth as a marvelous, generative force. Klaus Krüger reprises his sounding of *perfezione* and *grazia* (2016), alighting on the implicit tension—if not paradox—between rhetorical and pictorial evidence (*evidentia*). Pericolo's essay "The Renaissance Masterpiece: Giorgio Vasari on Perfection" is nuanced, deeply attuned to the theorist's language and to his historical method. This is a discursive intervention in the most positive sense, ranging from themes of divinity and illusion to horror, hair, threads, and feathers.

In the seventeenth century, perfections multiply. Andrew Hopkins ("Seeking Perfection: Scamozzi in Theory, Practice, and Posterity") judiciously teases out the ways in which rules—whether rhetorical, literary, or scientific—governed this architect's theoretical framework. Northern artists, particularly Michael Snyders, upended hierarchies emphasizing the body and *istoria*, focusing on nature's manifest variety, as Caroline Fowler reveals ("Metaprints in Seventeenth-Century Antwerp"). Poussin, by contrast, venerated the *istoria* and, as Henry Keazor shows ("'Per Natura Capace di Ogni Ornamento di Perfezione': Nicolas Poussin and Perfection"), Giovan Pietro Bellori gives witness to the artist's drive for perfection, founded on an erudite definition of invention. Estelle Lingo ("Passeri's Prologue, the *Paragone*, and the Hardness of Sculpture's Perfection") elegantly probes how Passeri, in evaluating Francesco Mochi and François Duquesnoy, registered but resisted old terms—*disegno*, *colorito*—and antique exemplars. For Correggio, in Oy-Marra's concluding contribution ("The Limits of Perfection: Giovan Pietro Bellori on 'Celerità' and 'Facilità'"), drawing was "at the tip of his brush" (275), according to Francesco Scannelli, such that he could simultaneously sketch and paint, instantly elevating both. She measures Bellori's opinion of Giovanni Lanfranco, intimating a new appreciation for the contradictory accomplishments of real-life practitioners.

In his introduction, Pericolo notes that the anthology's chief aim "is to stimulate reflection on the complexities involved in assessing early modern perfection" (29). This volume eloquently succeeds, inviting us, as well, to think about perfection's potent antitheses.

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Forgotten Healers: Women and the Pursuit of Health in Late Renaissance Italy.
Sharon T. Strocchia.

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In November 1620, Maria Maddalena of Austria, grand duchess of Tuscany, was feeling distinctly under the weather. Stomach ailments and an arthritic knee plagued