

Gert Jan van der Sman. *Ghirlandaio y el Renacimiento en Florencia*.

Exh. Cat. Madrid: Fundación Colección Thyssen-Bornemisza, 2010. 338 pp. index. illus. €38. ISBN: 978-8-4962-3389-8.

The quincennial of Domenico Ghirlandaio's (Domenico Bigordi, 1448/49–1493/94) death was celebrated with a conference on his life and work in Florence, the proceedings of which were edited by Wolfram Prinz and Max Seidel as *Domenico Ghirlandaio 1449–1494*. No major museum sought to display his oeuvre, nor has one in the subsequent fifteen years. Gert Jan van der Sman corrected this oversight by curating the modest exhibition *Ghirlandaio and the Renaissance in Florence* at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid during the summer and fall of 2010, with an accompanying exhibition catalogue also by van der Sman.

The catalogue is divided into five sections: late Quattrocento Florence; portraiture in this milieu; secular objects related to marriage; religious works that sanctified patrician palaces; and laboratory analysis of the materials and techniques used by Ghirlandaio in his *Portrait of Giovanna degli Albizzi*, a masterpiece in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza's collection, and the *raison d'être* for the exhibition. Each topic is introduced with a short essay by van der Sman, except for the religious art section, which is opened by Victor M. Schmidt. The introductory essays for each section concentrate on the Tornabuoni family, for whom the portrait of Giovanna was painted. The other works in the exhibition are primarily addressed in catalogue entries that discuss attribution and iconography. This catalogue, which promises to examine Ghirlandaio in late fifteenth-century Florentine culture, makes brief forays

into Ghirlandaio's oeuvre, but largely delivers a study of selected art pieces commissioned by the Tornabuoni family.

Members of the Tornabuoni family, patrician Florentines closely related to the Medici, were important patrons of Ghirlandaio, and are certainly worthy of further inquiry. The concise introductory essays highlight van der Sman's recent archival discoveries: the 1486 wedding poem by Naldo Naldi celebrating the nuptials of Lorenzo Tornabuoni to Giovanna degli Albizzi, a *Ricordo* of his life's events by Maso di Luca degli Albizzi, and an account book from the Albizzi family. A detailed discussion of these discoveries would have further enlightened the reader on the families involved. As a study of the Tornabuoni family, and the art objects they patronized, van der Sman views the Tornabuoni works in a romantic vein, celebrating the couple's love, Giovanna's beauty, and Ghirlandaio's talent. Van der Sman reiterates, without giving due credit, previous interpretations by Edgar Wind and John Spencer of Giovanna's *Three Graces* medal (292–93, 298–99); by Susanne Kress and Caroline Campbell of the Tornabuoni *spalliere* panels and Lorenzo's *camera bella* (294, 295); by Patricia Simons of the family and their chapel at Santa Maria Novella (269); by Patricia Simons and John Shearman of Giovanna's profile portrait (278–79); and by Alison Luchs, Ronald Kecks, and Jean Cadogan of Ghirlandaio's *Visitation* altarpiece (270).

Van der Sman's second essay, which examines Ghirlandaio's *Portrait of Giovanna degli Albizzi*, demonstrates the catalogue's focus on the Tornabuoni, where a concentration on Ghirlandaio's oeuvre and the social context of the works might have been more effective. In the exhibition, van der Sman successfully gave Giovanna's portrait an artistic context by surrounding it with other portraits of women by artists in Ghirlandaio's circle and by other Quattrocento artists. Van der Sman's conclusion that an analysis of Ghirlandaio's portraits, and those currently attributed to Ghirlandaio's circle, especially his portraits of women, require further examination is correct. A chronology of Ghirlandaio's portraits also awaits study.

A discussion of the social context of women in Quattrocento Florence would have deepened this essay, especially placing Giovanna's portrait within the rich scholarly discussion of gender and Renaissance portraits of women pursued over the last thirty years by Patricia Simons, Mary Garrard, Elizabeth Cropper, Mary Rogers, Joanna Woods-Marsden, and others. Giovanna's jewels not only attested to her married status, as stated by van der Sman (278), but also demonstrated the wealth of her conjugal family. Lorenzo Tornabuoni may have requested that Giovanna's profile portrait show "not only her physical but also her inner beauty" (278), but her portrait may also have acted as an exemplum for Lorenzo's second wife. Giovanna's premature death while pregnant must have been a tragedy for her family (269), but according to David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, it was a misfortune that befell a large number of married women in Quattrocento Florence.

Van der Sman's celebration of Ghirlandaio overlooks the social context of artists' education and social status. Fifteenth-century artists were working-class men. It is unlikely, as van der Sman states, that "Ghirlandaio was extolling the

power of his artistic creation,” in the epigram on Giovanna’s portrait (278). Ghirlandaio, who was raised in an artisan family, surely did not have the Latin or literary skills to rewrite a Martial epigram. Although Ghirlandaio may have had someone else compose it for him, it is unlikely that Lorenzo Tornabuoni sought Ghirlandaio’s praise of his own artistic talent on the portrait of Lorenzo’s deceased wife.

In collecting Ghirlandaio’s paintings, and those of his circle, van der Sman has brought the Tornabuoni family well-deserved prominence, and suggested further avenues of study for Ghirlandaio scholars.

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