

Gabriele Paleotti. *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*.

Ed. Paolo Prodi. Trans. William McCuaig. Texts & Documents. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2012. xiii + 354 pp. \$60. ISBN: 978-1-60606-116-9.

In 1582, what was meant by *publishing* was significantly different from practices of the printing industry today. Appearing at a time when copying of manuscripts by hand coexisted with the circulation of printed texts, Gabriele Paleotti's *Discorso* exhibited features of both forms of publication. Only two books of the *Discorso* were ever actually written (five were projected) and they were published "provisionally and noncommercially to facilitate consultation by experts" (16). We know this from the title page, which asks the reader to refer notes to the

author and “keep it confidential” as the text was not intended for publication. The book never went on sale and all the printed copies were distributed among cardinals, bishops, intellectuals, and artists. It was not until the 1594 Latin translation published in Ingolstadt that Paleotti’s treatise became more widely available.

Significantly, Paleotti ends his introductory note to the reader with the statement that he intends to “submit the whole work to the judgment and correction of the holy Apostolic See” (53). Historians now stress the continuities and blurring of distinctions between the correction of texts and actual censorship during this period. Paleotti’s desire for feedback before going public is a symptom of the pressures to which authors (even archbishops) were subjected. To complicate matters, Paleotti was rooted institutionally both in the Church of Rome and in the city of Bologna, with its rich cultural and intellectual life, where he was also highly regarded for his active participation in the art world. The English translation of his *Discorso*, originally written in the vernacular to make it available to practicing artisans and “originary Christians” (24), provides an immensely useful tool for studying tensions at the intersection of art, religion, and science, 200 years before these modern categories existed, especially when used in conjunction with Paola Barocchi’s annotated critical Italian edition (in *Trattati d’arte del Cinquecento*, volume 2, 1960), as the translator William McCuaig recommends. The edition includes an introductory essay by Paolo Prodi, the leading Paleotti scholar and thus a perfect choice to introduce complex theological and historical issues that readers deserve to have in mind as they read the primary source. As Prodi emphasizes (13), the treatise is important today because of the author’s unique position: Paleotti was a bishop, patron of commissions for artworks, theoretician of artistic phenomena, and collaborator at a high level with scientists and painters in one of the most cultivated university cities of Europe. A network of agents bundled into a single individual.

A comparison of Prodi’s well-honed contribution to the present volume with an earlier, more expansive essay (coauthored with Giuseppe Olmi) in the exhibition catalogue of *The Age of Correggio and the Carracci* (1986), demonstrates how his understanding of Paleotti’s treatise has evolved. In his 2012 essay, Prodi has less to prove, but his argument remains the same (it was always a matter of developing an epistemological framework adequate to the evidence): while there is no such thing as a “Tridentine style,” that should not deny the “overlapping and interwoven reciprocal influences” linking patrons to artists. In other words, Paleotti participated in what Bourdieu calls a “field of cultural production.” He was one significant factor in a complex sociocultural environment.

Given the recent global turn in the discipline of art history, this is a most appropriate way to introduce new readers to one of the most important early modern Christian texts on art. Paleotti’s views were adopted by many other authors, such as Francisco Pacheco, through whom the ideas circulated to the farthest reaches of Europe’s colonial domains. Pacheco’s 1649 *Arte de la pintura*, with its moralizing account of the artist adapted straight from Paleotti, became a foundational text at the Colegio de San Andrés in Quito, for example (my thanks to Carmen Fernández-Salvador for this information). Paleotti’s core understanding that images are the common language of all people and all social

classes, with the artist serving as a “silent theologian” (23, referring to book 2, chapters 51 and 52), was exported and actively received worldwide, as has only recently become an object of investigation. This edition is a very welcome new resource not only for Renaissance studies within Europe, therefore, but also in an emerging field of transcultural inquiry.

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