

*The Notion of the Painter-Architect in Italy and the Southern Low Countries.*

Piet Lombaerde, ed.

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If a painter in early modern Italy or the Low Countries produced particularly elaborate architectural scenes and even designed his own house, was he a painter-architect? Or, in the reverse, was an architect who also painted an architect-painter? If in the land of Linnean taxonomies such questions might excite, today one simply responds, “Why

not?” Although announced as the topics of this collection of essays, for the most part they are not. Of far greater interest are questions about how particular painters and architects negotiated or moved between these two practices and what each brought to them. Fortunately, most authors resist categorization and instead explore the modalities of exchange among the artists and the two practices, casting light on a fascinating and hitherto little explored topic.

Despite turf wars from the end of the sixteenth century forward, *disegno* — the art of giving form to an idea in a drawing or a design — unified painting, sculpture, and architecture. Invention through drawing lay at the heart of all three artistic practices, an understanding that permeated the thought of Alberti, Daniele Barbaro, Federico Zuccari, Serlio, Bramante, and Leonardo da Vinci in Italy, and the practices of Northern artists such as Wencelas Cobergher and Peter Paul Rubens. Particularly informative on *disegno* are essays by Werner Oechslin and Christopher Heuer. The collection’s greatest contribution comes in individual chapters such as these, and that of Sabine Frommel on the little-known paintings of Sebastiano Serlio’s early career. Her masterful study plumbs obscure sources and analyzes them to provide a framework for Serlio’s better-known treatise. Bruno Adorni illuminates Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola’s early accomplishments in drawing perspectives and how he later provided the perspectival drawings for his son-in-law’s frescoes at the villa Farnese at Caprarola, and may also have done so for those of Taddeo Zuccari.

Howard Burns correctly observes that elaborate architectural constructs played an increasingly large role in both religious and nonreligious representations after 1300, and that the painter-architect in sixteenth-century Rome was a professional type also later found in Northern Europe. While some painters (Giotto, Raphael, Francesco di Giorgio Martini) received major architectural commissions, others (Giovanni Bellini, Paolo Veronese) did not. Why this was so remains obscure, although the evidence that Burns and other contributors offer manifests the vagaries, if not idiosyncrasies, of courtly patronage. Ferrara’s duke commissioned painter Ercole de’Roberti to decorate the cradle for his first grandchild and triumphal carriages and triumphal arches for a wedding, while his son Alfonso directed Dosso Dossi to paint the fireplaces at the Belriguardo villa and the cornices at his Belvedere palace. Jacopo Barozzi, il Vignola, memorably painted footstools for Pope Paul III. The paltry available evidence indicates that at least some artists greeted such commissions with little enthusiasm, suggesting that the blurring of activities in painting and in architecture often had less to do with personal inclination and more with the caprices of patrons.

Less obvious but increasingly common were painters and architects designing and decorating their own residences. Mantegna’s house in Mantova may have been the earliest and most prominent in Italy, and Peter Paul Rubens’s house in Antwerp was certainly the most famous in the North. Both artists ably demonstrated that through their mastery of *disegno* they could design anything, from a painting to a house. More than a third of the book is dedicated to Rubens’s career as a student of architecture, as a painter, and as architect of his own house. From his published study of painted

facades in Genoa to preliminary drawings for his paintings, Rubens demonstrated a keen interest in architecture, leading not only to public commissions, such as for a Jesuit church, but to his own house and garden pavilion. Like Giulio Romano and Raphael, Rubens's personal fascination with architecture guided experiments in painting and architectural design. The character of Rubens's architectural works, including fascinating digital reconstructions, is well covered in essays by Piet Lombaerde, Stefano Musso, Giulio Girondi, Stefan Boeykens, and Carolien De Staelen.

Although unpleasant to note, the problem of an abundance of grammatical errors in otherwise quality contributions is too severe to overlook. Almost all of the texts are by nonnative speakers of English and thus available to a broad audience, but dismal grammar is a poor trade-off. Common in an era of pinched editorial budgets, the task must necessarily devolve to authors and editors.

DIANE YVONNE GHIRARDO, *University of Southern California*