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Lorenzo Lotto: Pictor Celeberimus (review)

Creighton Gilbert

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(Review)

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research. All of the contributors undertake their difficult tasks with reassuringly refined textual and visual skills. The editors are to be congratulated for producing a stimulating and informative book.

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Claudia Bertling Biaggini. *Lorenzo Lotto: Pictor Celeberimus*.

Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2006. 246 pp. index. illus. bibl. €49.80. ISBN: 3-487-13003-3.

This 6 × 8 inch paperback intersperses about ninety text pages with sixty-nine illustrations. As the title confirms, it presents the artist as a whole. That its aim is to be a popular introduction is reinforced by the one color image: the cover, a female portrait by the artist combining a gorgeous costume with somewhat strange facial expression, used also in at least two previous Lotto books. Yet the text assumes scholars as its readers, citing previous debates, often in their original languages. (In one odd case the translation of a Latin text is given, but into Italian.) So too the book's Latin name rather neatly combines the generalist message with a quote from an actual document and with a claim for the significance of the theme. The footnotes and bibliography, in smaller type, are actually longer than the text, and the bibliography consists of 270 items.

The author tells us right away that a birthday present of Berenson's classic study of Lotto first interested her in the artist and, at the end, that among the artist's many and varied original explorations "the Rosetta stone for his works was not to be found." One may rightly infer a certain casualness. Her many quotations almost always adopt her predecessors' conclusions. The concerns of portraiture, landscape, and religious teaching all have weight, and the book can be recommended for one seeking a summary of the Lotto literature. It is too brief to do much more, and the analyses are rather limited. The label of *proto-Baroque* recurs at numerous points, and may seem a problem when we are told that Parmigianino, Correggio, and Pontormo are proto-Baroque too, because their figures show mobility. Comparisons with other artists are extremely numerous and not always convincing, as with a long comparison with Holbein. The recent sound monograph by Humfrey is much quoted, and its 160 illustrations are no more than what is needed — here there are too many descriptions without a picture.

Two conspicuous cases suggest that when, by exception, a hypothesis outside the critical mainstream is adopted, it does not convince, and the lack of any reasons for doubt seems usual. The *Stanza cella Segnatura* of Raphael, a minor scene for which a preparatory drawing by Raphael survives, is attributed to Lotto mainly since its technique is unlike Raphael's. The composition is commonly assigned to Raphael's workshop in the year in question (1511), and this seems plausible. It is less so to think that one, who had already been called *celeberimus* and paid a 100 florin fee by the pope, might function here as a virtually mechanical helper. I

cannot think of any such case, so it seems contrary to the social norms for commissions at the time.

The portrait on the cover, where the sitter takes the heroine Lucretia as her model, was identified in 1971 as a woman of that name from a patrician family in Venice, whose descendants owned the picture when it was first recorded in 1797. Her marriage date matches the style-date usually assigned to the painting. The family ownership in 1797 is most plausibly due to inheritance, and a market purchase by such people before that time is not plausible. Bertling Biaggini does not mention this study, but only, and then with approval, a recent one rejecting it and calling the record of 1797 maybe “fortuitous and irrelevant,” even while noting that “most scholars have accepted it” and one should “not necessarily reject it.” At least it should be cited.

The religious reading of the Trescore frescoes cites various texts, but not the Gospel’s basic one, “I am the vine.” Typographical errors are commendably few, but two may be cited that were both puzzling and difficult to set straight: in Lotto’s will “in aria” should be “in Maria” (153), and Dolce’s negative criticism, a rarity for the period, is on page 154 of the edition of his book cited, not 184 (note 156 in chapter 4).

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Maddalena Spagnolo. *Correggio: Geografia e storia della fortuna (1528–1657)*.

Quaderni 8. Milan: Fondazione Il Correggio, 2005. 312 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$47.50. ISBN: 88–8215–914–0.

Meaning is not permanently inscribed in works of art. It shifts from the moment of the images’ making to periods in which they are being copied as models, collected for their aesthetic features, and scrutinized in the art literature. Tracing the history of how certain works and artists have been looked at — the exchanges between art objects and their endless parade of viewers — means to reconstruct their fortune, or, in modern terms, their reception. Maddalena Spagnolo’s book considers the critical and figurative fortune of a great Italian Renaissance artist, Antonio Allegri, better known as Correggio. Methodologically Spagnolo’s volume falls into reception history, considering viewers’ responses to Correggio’s art not as a guarantor of truth or correctness but as an index of the painter and his production to generate meanings under specific circumstances.

Spagnolo’s volume is divided into ten chapters and is well illustrated by numerous color images (although some are unnecessarily duplicated). Each chapter offers a discussion of the perception and reception of Correggio’s work covering the period from 1528 — when the artist was still alive — to 1657. Quite interesting is the second chapter focusing on the interpretation that Ortensio Lando offers in his *Catalogi* (1552). Spagnolo argues that it is a genuine reading of