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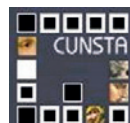
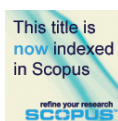
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Alessandro Serrani (2024), *Lavoro e arte. Le corporazioni di mestiere nel Rinascimento bolognese*, Bologna: Edizioni Pendragon, 545 pp.

Alessandro Serrani's deeply researched, beautifully illustrated and illuminating book is a welcome contribution to the topic of the artistic patronage of the *arti* or *corporazioni di mestiere* (trade guilds) in Bologna and field of Italian Renaissance art. Whereas other scholars have studied the patronage of individual guilds or select comparisons, Serrani is the first to examine more holistically guild patronage in Bologna, from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth century. He perceives a connection between this artistic flourishing and the waning political, yet waxing socioeconomic fortunes of the guilds. In its broadest sense, his work argues for the greater relevance of fifteenth-century Bologna in the larger narrative of Italian Renaissance art. Serrani's pithy introduction clearly sets out the parameters of the book. Rejecting the prevailing monographic or comparative methods of studying guild patronage in Bologna, he sets the timeframe of his

wider study as the innovative period of the fifteenth century until 1506, when Pope Julius II entered Bologna, signaling a definitive turning point. Considering the scholarly attention that manuscripts have received, Serrani instead prioritizes the arts of painting, sculpture, woodworking, and to a lesser degree architecture. His research highlights both renowned artists as well as lesser-known and unrecognizable creators who benefited from guild patronage. Importantly, his analysis of the monumental arts takes into careful consideration the original physical spaces, chapels and meeting rooms, which he calls «spazi nevralgici della vita corporativa» (p. 7). The thorough illustrations facilitate the comprehension of the author's ideas and support his arguments. In the chapters ahead, by thinking inclusively about the visual arts, architectural settings and function, Serrani succeeds in vivifying these spaces – many of which have been lost – and their role in Renaissance Bolognese society.

In the first chapter, Serrani establishes the groundwork by summarizing the complex and, at points, contested history of the *arti* of Bologna and their relation-

ship to social prestige and political power. The first part treats the origins, development and vicissitudes of the guilds, within the history of the Commune of Bologna (established 1116). Attentive to primary sources and modern scholarship, he establishes the chronology of the guilds: The first indisputable documented source dates to 1194, but unclear documents of the mid-twelfth century may reveal an earlier existence and the loss of written sources may obscure an older past. More critical to the study at hand, he demonstrates how, between c. 1200 and c. 1500, the *corporazioni di mestiere* held and lost their role in civic government, evolving from an entity involved in governing, into autonomous, yet nonpolitical organizations. Part two defines the possibilities for the seats of guilds, which became sites of artistic patronage. Serrani makes several points to clarify the relationship between the guilds and city and to set the stage for the fertile period of guild patronage. First, he argues: «È probabile che proprio la perdita di potere abbia generato una volontà, alimentata dalla congiuntura socioeconomica favorevole, di riaffermarlo almeno da un punto di vista esteriore, dando vita a una ricchissima compagna di committenza alla quale tutte, forse anche spinte da una certa competitività» (p. 22). Secondly, he demonstrates that the guilds increasingly built independent *palazzi* (rather than being housed in rental or communal spaces) in the center of Bologna, which required significant financial resources and created another impetus for the rise in artistic commissions in the fifteenth century. The two maps illustrating this development reinforce the congregation of these sites and their visibility in the city. Finally, Serrani notes that the acquisition of chapels by the Arte dei Notai and Arte dei Macellai, in the revered

basilica of San Petronio, similarly functioned as status symbols.

The significance of Serrani's work is evident in the three middle chapters in which several compelling arguments are developed, including: the artistic projects sponsored by the guilds communicated social and economic relevance; the patronage of the *corporazioni* was distinct from the taste of the Bentivoglio and ruling elite; and the increase in guild headquarters fostered artistic innovation and collaboration.

In chapter two, Serrani reviews the artistic network favored by the ruling Bentivoglio family and their circle. These elite patrons promoted the courtly, decorative and refined style of the Ferrarese school, especially Francesco Cossa, Ercole de' Roberti, and Lorenzo Costa. Serrani then outlines a distinct group of guild paintings, starting with the earliest known commission in 1382, and their makers, such as Antonio Leonelli da Crevalcore and Alberto di Lorenzo Segni, as well as unnamed masters. In the pages that follow, especially chapter five, Serrani develops this claim that the guilds' wider circle of artists, representing diverse training and schools, contributed to fostering the pluralistic artistic culture of Bologna.

The range of artists in chapter two – many of whom are non-natives – leads to the contradiction that Serrani interrogates in the next chapter: How did foreign artists gain access to the Bolognese art market when (paradoxically) guild rules hindered their entry? Building upon the work of other scholars, Serrani traces an established practice in which newly arrived artists associated themselves with the workshop of an established master – as collaborator, not apprentice – as a stepping stone to independence. One example is painter Marco Zoppo from Cento (1433-78), who joined the workshop

of Bolognese woodcarver Agostino de' Marchi, showing that relationships could cross media.

In chapter four, Serrani turns from the makers to their creations, examining the specific formats and techniques employed in guild commissions. He argues that their patronage was instrumental in creating a new typology, which he names "dipinti consiliari," «un particolare tipo di manufatto rispondente alle esigenze di spazio delle compagnie cittadine e di uffici pubblici» (p. 96). This horizontal format and unified picture field drew upon local as well as northern and central Italian models.

The final chapter, comprising about half the text, delves into these and related issues in four case studies of the *Arti dei Notai*, *Muratori*, *Speziali*, and *Strazzaroli*. Using archival documents, historical manuscripts and careful visual analysis, along with previous scholarship, Serrani forensically pieces together fragmentary evidence to reconstruct the artistic environments of the guilds and analyze the individual works of art. The result is a wide-ranging picture of the robust patronage of the trade guilds, from their objectives and practices to the range of formats and media (fresco, panel painting, painting on canvas, sculpture, stained glass, intarsia, and woodworking), variety of artists, and predilection for foreign artists and modern styles. Ultimately, Serrani demonstrates that art played a key role in the representation of the *arti*. For instance, in chapter five's section on the prestigious *Arte dei Notai*, he proposes that Bartolomeo da Rimini's *Incredulity of St. Thomas* fresco (1463) for the notary's meeting room is an inflection point of modernity in Renaissance Bologna, with its attention to figures turned in space. Overlooked due to the painter's present obscurity and its poor condition, the fres-

co is, according to Serrani, key to understanding the origins of the unified picture field in Bologna. Serrani proposes that Bartolomeo's inspiration was Piero della Francesca's horizontal fresco of *Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta praying before St. Sigismondo* (1451), in his birthplace of Rimini. The *Notai's St. Thomas* fresco is a pivotal moment in the development of the horizontal format of «dipinti consiliari». In tracing the origins of this new format, Serrani expands his analysis to the altarpiece of the *Adoration of the Child with Saints*, c. 1470, originally in San Paolo in Monte all'Osservazione (today, Collezioni Comunali d'Arte, Bologna), which he attributes to Zanobi da Migliore. He makes a strong case that it was Zanobi who introduced the *pala quadra* into Bologna, not Francesco del Cossa who made a *pala quadra* of the *Annunciation* for the same church of the Osservanza. Though unique in Bologna, the unified picture field would have been conventional to the Florentine Zanobi. Along with these particulars, Serrani encourages us to think beyond the canon of famous artists, to look closely at the art and extant documentation and to question prevailing assumptions about Renaissance art.

In sum, Serrani positions the trade guilds at the heart of artistic innovation in fifteenth-century Bologna and places the city in dialogue with major artistic developments in Renaissance Italy. The relevance of *Lavoro e arte* lies in both the details and overarching arguments. He makes numerous contributions to refining the careers and oeuvres of artists, from woodworker Andrea Marchesi da Formigine, to the Maestro della *pala dei Muratori* (whose identity was first defined by Daniele Benati) and Francesco Raibolini, Il Francia. The book contests the marginalization of fifteenth-century Bolognese art and, instead, envisions it in

conversation with the major trends of celebrated Renaissance centers and regions, such as Tuscany and Umbria. In Serrani's original work, Bologna and the *arti* participate in the most exciting artistic questions of the day and our perspective of artistic production widens to encompass

the creations and innovations of unfamiliar artists and collaborative endeavors. This is a most appropriate outcome for a study on the *corporazioni di mestiere*.

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