

Maria Forcellino. *Michelangelo, Vittoria Colonna e gli "spirituali": Religiosità e vita artistica a Roma negli anni Quaranta.*

La corte dei papi 18. Rome: Viella S.r.l., 2009. 278 pp. + 14 color and 16 b/w pls. index. append. illus. bibl. €30. ISBN: 978-88-8334-379-7.

In this book, Maria Forcellino aims to contribute new insights to the debate over Michelangelo's relations with the Italian "spirituali," by paying particular attention to the potential circulation of paintings by and/or after Michelangelo

among the members of the group of reformers, as well as to various of the sculptures on the tomb of Pope Julius II in San Pietro in Vincoli, recently restored by her brother Antonio. Thanks to the restoration, Forcellino argues, the statue of Julius, as well as the *vita contemplativa* representing Mary Magdalene, can now be appreciated as the works most clearly reflecting Michelangelo's artistic concerns in the 1540s, influenced by his links to the reformists.

Chapter 1, on Michelangelo's relations with the "spirituali," revisits ground already covered by previous scholarship, including the status of the *Beneficio di Cristo* as a representative tract for Italian reformers, and the insights into the artist's relationship with Vittoria Colonna afforded by Francisco de Holanda's Roman dialogues. While I might tend to be more circumspect about viewing de Holanda's work in a historical rather than a primarily literary vein, the reviewing of previous lines of enquiry here is generally engaging, the frequent citation of letters providing a particularly useful source of information. It is notable and welcome that Forcellino is fully engaged with the range of secondary bibliography on her subject in English.

Chapter 2 again reviews earlier debates, this time concerning Michelangelo's presentation drawings for Vittoria Colonna. Here the author argues against the grain of previous critical opinion, making use of new archival sources, as well as of the key use of the term *quadro* in correspondence relating to the works and a reappraisal of Michelangelo's relationship with Marcello Venusti, in order to present the Colonna drawings as preparatory rather than finished, in the sense that they led to paintings that Michelangelo oversaw or else completed himself. In the latter case, Forcellino argues, there would be good reason by the 1550s to "disappear" small painted works by Michelangelo that related the artist too closely to the by now suspect devotional context of the Viterbo group. While the material accumulated is very suggestive, it is a pity that the lack of any such painted works by Michelangelo prevents the possibility of more concrete conclusions. Nonetheless, Forcellino's careful sifting of the evidence allows the status of the Colonna drawings to remain a pleasingly open question, awaiting the accumulation of further documentary traces in the future.

The final chapter looks in detail at the statue of Pope Julius in San Pietro in Vincoli, a subject on which the author, as well as her brother, have already published extensively. Beginning by asserting the sculpture's rightful place within the corpus of works by Michelangelo, Forcellino goes on to assess its fundamental connection with the devotional context of the "spirituali." Via a progressive analysis of the various contracts for the tomb and the changes made to the plans for presentation of the papal statue, the author arrives at the conclusion that the radical nature of this sculpture's formal solutions, which have in the past aroused "incomprehension and embarrassment" (176) in onlookers, was intended to transform the warrior pope into a penitent and reformed character according to the artist's own devotional concerns. A brief consideration of a published letter from Colonna to her cousin Costanza D'Avalos is related to an analysis of the statue of the *vita contemplativa* in the same location, and makes similar links to the "spirituali," although Forcellino

appears not to be aware of Peter Amour's article of 1997, which made the same arguments for this work.

As this is primarily an art historical analysis, the role played by Vittoria Colonna in the text is relatively minor, despite her co-presence in the title. I would have welcomed further consideration in particular of the fascinating glimpse of her apparent duties as dispenser of spiritual images within the Viterbo group. In 1546 Cardinal Pole offered his copy of a *Pietà* by Michelangelo to Cardinal Gonzaga, and told him not to worry about the loss, "because we could get another one from the Marchesa of Pescara" (86), suggesting that Colonna had more works in her possession at one time or another than the three drawings commonly ascribed to her. Such agency adds an intriguing new facet to our understanding of Colonna's character and role in Viterbo.

This is a book centred in careful and close re-examination of questions of attribution and ownership that have vexed previous scholars. Despite the slightly frustrating lack of concrete evidence allowing for broader conclusions, a number of highly interesting questions are thrown open for further consideration. Thus it constitutes a worthy addition to the growing scholarship on Michelangelo and reform thought.

ABIGAIL BRUNDIN

University of Cambridge, St. Catherine's College