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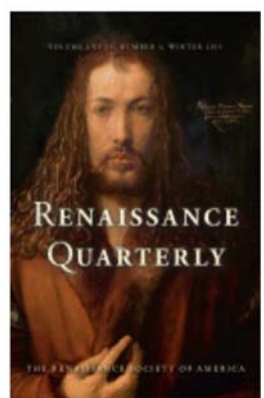
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*Display of Art in the Roman Palace, 1550–1750.* Gail Feigenbaum, ed.

With Francesco Freddolini. Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2014. xiv + 368 pp. \$75.

When we think about the theme of the display of art in Roman palaces, the image that takes shape in our mind is generally one of a series of rooms with walls covered by hangings in gaudy colors or valuable tapestries, depending on the season; we imagine paintings by diverse artists hung so that they are in dialogue with each other; we see inlaid tables next to oriental carpets, and antique and modern sculptures arranged against frescoed walls. What comes to mind is a stage set that, by means of the skilful orchestration of hundreds of objects, transmits political and social messages, and suggests the aesthetic preferences of the inhabitants of the palaces.

This is the cultural background of the volume *Display of Art in the Roman Palace*, the result of an ambitious international research program commissioned by the Getty Research Institute, with meetings and specialized workshops that have faced the multiple aspects composing the study of the “culture of living” in Rome along two centuries of history.

The palace in this period indeed becomes a laboratory for catalyzing the interaction among sculpture, painting, furniture, and decorative arts for the patron’s splendor. The history of the Roman elite and their magnificent palaces, in which to live and entertain with formality and expensive ostentation, is the common thread of the text, tackled by the several contributions by eminent researchers in the field.

Rome is the focus of the volume because, as an international capital, it was outstanding in setting the artistic trends others would have followed in Europe and beyond. From the late sixteenth

century to the early eighteenth century, the town was a magnet for foreign diplomats and tourists, as well as for artists and artisans, all of whom carried the models of Roman display back with them when they returned home.

Gail Feigenbaum, editor of the volume, observes that the history of art was developed as much in the form of display of art on the walls as it was in the pages of books like Vasari's. The display, for the Roman palace, was not a static figure but was conditioned by a multitude of factors. Objects of art were ensemble players hung on walls, part of a culturally specific social institution.

Some important specialized research on this field has been published in the past few decades, but they tend to be atomized in microhistories of individual families and palaces, the outcome of studies on patronage and collecting. *Display* charts a different course as it approaches the processes by which objects of art and decorative media were integrated into ensembles and environments in which people conducted their lives. To focus on the specific Roman social and cultural context, the authors tap other methodologies, such as, for example, the economic history of the mechanisms of production and circulation of the art market and the processes by which desire is negotiated into concrete, yet contingent and changing, aesthetic environments.

The interiors of the palaces are examined in the volume through different types of sources. The inventories and the registers of the *guardaroba* are rich sources of information, while bank accounts and financial records document the expenses for the luxury goods that furnished the Roman palaces. Books of designs of furniture, pictures and sculptures, treatises (like Pontano's *Libri delle virtù sociali*, recurrent in many of the essays in the volume), references to visits, and guidebooks all open the

doors of the Roman palaces to visitors, describing the visits when guests admired artifacts, natural curiosities, pictures, and manuscripts of a special worth.

Like all stage sets, the displays of the Roman palaces were temporary and transitory, subject to constant changes when things were added, removed, or shifted from one place to another. The original connotation of display as an action, a metaphorical gesture enacting possession, is one of the focuses of this study. A dynamic concept of display is embodied in the thought and performance leading and responding to the arrangement of things. Display, as opposed to collecting, assumes change: it considers how tapestries are hung, removed, or substituted by *corami* according to the season and the occasion; how silver is heaped on the credenza for a banquet; or how old paintings stored in the *guardaroba* or in the country villa might be retrieved for a new room.

This book provides an outstanding knowledge base for the phenomena of the Baroque ambiente in their historical context, exploring them as they were embedded in the social values of the day. Display in quantity and variety, of that which is superior in quality and artistry, was meticulously theorized for the Italian society. Magnificence and splendor were forthrightly political instruments that motivated and were manifest in the display of art in the Roman palace.

SILVIA BELTRAMO, *Politecnico di Torino*