

Claire J. Farago, ed. *Leonardo da Vinci and the Ethics of Style*.

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008. 269 pp. + 8 color pls. index. illus. bibl. \$84.95. ISBN: 978-0-7190-7814-9.

Written some decades after the explorations of *Rezeptionsgeschichte* by Michael Baxandall and John Shearman most notably, Claire Farago's observation that "the contemporary historian's experience and that of historical viewers cannot be the same" (151) comes as little surprise. But is it, in a historical perspective, for Leonardo da Vinci "the painter's social responsibility . . . to demonstrate the relation of man to the universe or divine law" (9)? Is it Leonardo's goal to let the viewer "return to a state of grace" (11)? Both *style* and *ethics* are terms that remain

sfumati throughout this book with the reader in the end learning little substantial about their presumed relationship (or identity) in Leonardo.

Only Mary Pardo's essay focuses on the major tension between the unprecedented commitment to mimesis and the idiosyncrasies of style in Leonardo's art and theory. In the artist's later psychological reflections, Pardo observes a critique of memory and of the categories of the *sensus communis*, and an affirmation of the fluidity of imagination informed by perceptions. The fact that the article is a "revised version" of one published in 1991 may explain the absence of any discussion of more recent literature on Leonardo's psychology (for instance, Domenico Laurenza's fundamental contributions). In her illuminating article, Fredrika H. Jacobs revises the stereotype of Leonardo's "homosexual" style. She traces the notion back to a misreading of Vasari's biography, whose balanced notions include gender oppositions that blend Castiglione's male courtier with Firenzuola's ideal of women. Mario Equicola's paradox of the *masculo femmina* provides a striking parallel for Vasari's descriptive categories. To be sure, Jacobs's argument focuses on Vasari's *interpretation* of Leonardo, a biographical construction that downplays the scandal of Leonardo's scientific interests. According to Catherine M. Soussloff's essay, the combination of ethos (of the artist) and pathos (of the work of art) "comes into European historical imagination with Leonardo da Vinci" (39). Soussloff hints at early equations between Leonardo's physique, his character, and his artistic prowess; reads Antonio de' Beatis's reference to "Lunardo Vinci" as "Leonardo the victorious, or rising, moon" (49); and concludes that, through the notion of style, we seek "the understanding of ourselves in or with the work of art" (40). Robert Zwijnenberg's article, here essentially published for the fourth time since 2003, discusses Leonardo's Louvre *Saint John* as a hybrid of the Baptist, Bacchus, the Angel of the Annunciation, and Leonardo himself. Implicitly, Leonardo's dictum that "every painter paints himself" appears as an affirmation, not as a damnation. Leonardo aims at representing the invisible (the fragmented "inner soul of this body" [111]), Zwijnenberg assumes, and he even detects some self-referentiality ("the sensuous and sensual character of painting" [111]). Embedded in a somewhat escalating theoretical framework ("these large questions" [148]), Claire Farago points at the devotional background of Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks* and relates it to Byzantine aesthetics of light and movement, in a "condensed and revised" version of an article published first in 2002 in German and then one year later in English. Farago's conflation of theology ("inner journey" [154]) and Leonardo's program as a painter-theorist ("optical color" [158]), with the common denominator of "truth," lacks further historical evidence. Janis Bell's perspicuous article on Leonardo's *sfumato* and its relation to optics is a slightly revised version of her German article (published in 2002; referenced in the footnote, but not listed in the bibliography). Problems of ethics are irrelevant for this thorough discussion of style. Pauline Maguire Robison interprets Poussin's *Israelites Gathering Manna in the Wilderness* as a paradigm of Leonardo's presumed influence, but the categories of comparison (*rilievo*, *varietà*, anatomical correctness)

are unspecific, and Poussin's devastating critique of Leonardo's texts on painting remains in the dark.

Altogether, the ambition and pretense of this book, namely to reflect upon ourselves as scholars in terms of morality and social responsibility, is challenged by its remarkable neglect of scholarly standards. Already the fact that four out of seven essays are more or less condensed versions of previous publications, but even more the almost programmatic disregard of non-English literature raises critical questions (e.g., Ulrich Pfisterer's groundbreaking monograph on Donatello and the discovery of style [2002]; Fabio Frosini's important articles on Leonardo and Renaissance philosophy). After reading the book, "the amnesia that modernism has bestowed upon us" (20) persists, I'm afraid.

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