

a secondary connotation of *performances*, its resonances reflect and enhance the book's emphasis on the dynamic, multifaceted processes at work.

MIA REINOSO GENONI

Yale University

Jonathan K. Nelson, ed. *Plautilla Nelli (1524–1588): The Painter-Prioress of Renaissance Florence*.

The Villa Rossa Series: Intercultural Perspectives on Italy and Europe 4. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008. xv + 210 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$24.95. ISBN: 978–88–9525003–8.

Unlike other female artists of the early modern period, such as Sofonisba Anguissola and Artemisia Gentileschi, the sixteenth-century Florentine painter and Dominican nun Plautilla Nelli has remained obscure. This fact is not surprising given that Nelli's extant oeuvre comprises only three paintings — a *Lamentation* (Museo di San Marco, Florence), a *Last Supper* (Santa Maria Novella, Florence), and a *Pentecost* (San Domenico, Perugia) — along with handful of drawings, meaning that opportunities to see her works are extremely rare. Moreover, given that Nelli was evidently self-taught, the range of her technical abilities was limited, and because she was both a prioress and a painter of strictly of devotional images, her art is by definition less provocative than that of her Mannerist contemporaries and thus less likely to attract the eye of would-be researchers. She was, however, held in high esteem in her own day, as evidenced not only by Giorgio Vasari's praise of her, but also by her inclusion, over a generation later, in an account of notable members of the Dominican order by the chronicler Serafino Razzi.

This volume, edited by Jonathan K. Nelson, contains essays from a variety of perspectives (the Italian contributions translated with great fluidity by Dorothea Barrett) and is sure to introduce Nelli to a much broader audience of scholars and students alike. Those familiar with the proceedings

of the 1998 Nelli symposium (*Suor Plautilla Nelli (1523–1588): The First Woman Painter of Florence* [2000]) will recognize a number of themes and authors — and even essays — here, but, in addition to supplementing and refining previous studies, this volume contains high-quality color reproductions of both paintings and drawings. Thus, for the first time, the freshness and color of Nelli's art is available for study outside Italy. Additionally, the brevity of the essays, the appended translations of Vasari and Razzi, and the reasonable price will make it a useful teaching tool for courses on Renaissance art and culture.

While there is not space here to mention every essay in the volume, several stand out. Catherine Turrill clarifies elements of Nelli's biography and career on the basis of archival sources. She also demonstrates that Nelli functioned as an official *madre pittrice*, overseeing her convent's artistic production. Andrea Muzzi's significant contribution situates Nelli and her convent in the Savonarolan revival of the post-Tridentine period. Muzzi also decisively dispels the notion that Nelli studied under Fra Paolino, and links Nelli's artistic activity to the Cinquecento phenomenon of dilettantism. Sally Quinn considers Nelli's position in contemporary artistic literature. Resisting a gendered reading, she argues that the criteria by which Vasari and Razzi judged Nelli were consistent with those applied to male artists. Magnolia Scudieri examines Nelli's selective use of sources in the *Lamentation*, addressing the artist's uses of well-known works by Sarto, Perugino, Fra Bartolommeo, and others. Two somewhat overlapping essays by Ann Roberts and Cristina Acidini consider Nelli's *Last Supper*. Roberts situates Nelli's painting in the context of other Dominican treatments of the theme and within the tradition of refectory decoration, while Acidini offers insightful and often entertaining reflections on the artistic heritage of the *Last Supper*. Marzia Faietti's appendix comprises a brief but lucid essay on the problems that have clouded correct identification of Nelli's drawings, followed by a checklist of known drawings, and Catherine Turrill provides an annotated checklist of her paintings.

While each of the essays in the volume illuminates an individual aspect of Nelli's career, it must be acknowledged that the overall picture of the artist remains fragmentary, and that she still needs to be placed in a broader critical framework. A number of essays, for instance, isolate specifically Dominican or Savonarolan iconographic motifs, but little is said of what role these influences might play in her painting style. Although the archaism of Nelli's manner may be the result of technical limitations, she also seems to deliberately cultivate a *maniera devota* — a term that Vasari applied to the sweet and archaizing style of artists like Perugino and Francia. Indeed, she drew after Michelangelo and presumably knew the currents of Florentine Mannerism, but chose to imitate more conservative models, including Perugino. Such a synthesis of subject and style — beyond orthodox iconography — was critical for creating devotional images in a post-Tridentine (and Savonarolan) convent, where dazzling displays of invention would be indecorous.

That such questions can even be asked about Nelli's work is a testament to the pioneering nature of this volume, and the contributors are to be commended on making it possible for Nelli to be a topic of discussion at all.

JESSE LOCKER

Metropolitan Museum of Art

Gabriele Köster. *Künstler und ihre Brüder: Maler, Bildhauer und Architekten in den venezianischen Scuole Grandi (bis ca. 1600)*.

Berliner Schriften zur Kunst 22. Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2008. 642 pp. index. append. illus. gloss. bibl. €89. ISBN: 978-3-7861-2548-8.

At the core of Gabriele Köster's work lies an inquiry into the social history of artists in Venice between the fourteenth century and ca. 1600. In this volume, a revised version of her dissertation, Köster identifies the archives of the Venetian *scuole* as a cache of relevant source material