

## The fabric of evidence: reconstructing the history of Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura* and rethinking the narratives of its reception since the sixteenth century

Review of:

*The Fabrication of Leonardo da Vinci's Trattato della pittura with a scholarly edition of the editio princeps (1651) and an annotated English translation*, edited by Claire Farago, Janis Bell and Carlo Vecce, with a foreword by Martin Kemp, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018, ISBN 9789004353787 e-book, ISBN 9789004353756 hardback, 2 vols, 1303 pages, b/w and colour ill.

Ricardo De Mambro Santos

Divided in two volumes also available in a manageable e-book format, this monumental editorial enterprise – exquisitely illustrated with high quality images – is the result of many years of research and the extensive collaboration among well-known scholars who have already explored, in previous individual publications, the intricate net of Leonardo's writings and their complex, fascinating channels of circulation, transformation and reinterpretation since the sixteenth century. Published within the series Brill's *Studies on Art, Art History, and Intellectual History*, this edition presents a remarkably well-conducted scholarly analysis of Leonardo da Vinci's *Trattato della pittura*,<sup>1</sup> examined in its polyhedral aspects, as well as a philologically accurate translation of the original text into English, prepared by Claire Farago and Janis Bell.<sup>2</sup> Accompanied by an almost labyrinthine, yet clearly arranged, critical apparatus to the text, the present edition is further enriched by capacious notes, useful tables of concordance and a most welcome annotated bibliography of later publications of Leonardo's writings focusing on the history of the illustrations used in those different editions. From a scholarly standpoint, these volumes represent a coherent development of another encyclopedic enterprise organized by Claire Farago, a decade ago, entitled *Re-reading Leonardo: The Treatise on Painting across Europe, 1550-1900*.<sup>3</sup> Given the stunning magnitude of this editorial project, this review will be focused exclusively on the description and analysis of the essays collected in the first volume, since the

<sup>1</sup> Paris: Jacques Langlois, 1651.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that this is the first English translation of the treatise since John Francis Rigaud's 1802 edition to be presented according to scholarly parameters. See John Francis Rigaud, *A Treatise on Painting by Leonardo da Vinci, faithfully translated from the original Italian, and now first digested under proper heads*, London: J. Taylor at the Architectural Library, 1802.

<sup>3</sup> Claire J. Farago, ed., *Re-reading Leonardo: The Treatise on Painting across Europe, 1550 to 1900*, Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2009.

second volume is entirely devoted to the annotated translation of the *Trattato*, presented, first, in the English version, numbered in progressive chapters, followed by the original Italian text, printed in italics in the transcription by Carlo Vecce, Anna Sconza, and Maria Rascaglia. The Italian text is also accompanied by a rich apparatus of footnotes quite similar to the ones used in the 1995 publication of the *Libro di pittura* edited by Carlo Pedretti.<sup>4</sup>

### **Practices of knowledge: examining the paths of circulation and the modes of reception of Leonardo's writings**

The first volume presents a very cohesive and well-organized set of – conceptually interconnected – essays. Behind this ambitious, yet admirably conducted, editorial enterprise is the concept of reception. In the Preface, Claire Farago programmatically recalls Pierre Bourdieu's paradigm of the 'field of cultural production' in order to clarify the overarching goal of this publication: to provide, along with the critical edition of an (excellent, one must add) English translation, a close investigation of the intertwined paths through which Leonardo's *discorsi* and drawings have been reassembled in an 'abridged' version by his assistant Francesco Melzi (thus originating the manuscript known as the Codex Urbinas Vaticanus Latinus 1270, or *Libro di pittura*). This manuscript will become the source of many copies and versions that will be, in turn, selectively adapted, rearranged and reinterpreted by a group of artists, publishers and editors working in association with the circle of Cassiano dal Pozzo in Rome, before migrating to France, where the *editio princeps* of this palimpsest-looking treatise will be printed in 1651. The various essays collected in this present edition address, in fact, the role played in such a continual process of textual, artistic and conceptual reassessment by sixteenth-century copies of the 'abridged' version of Leonardo's text, produced in centers such as Florence and Urbino, or by seventeenth-century manuscripts circulating in Rome and Milan. All essays converge toward this essential point: the reception of Leonardo's ideas can be better understood thanks to the systematic study of the different channels through which the various manuscripts have circulated in Italy and, afterwards, in Europe. As Claire Farago points out, this perspective of inquiry 'places us in a good position to ask what was actually known of Leonardo's writings and illustrations and, just as importantly, how they were read and viewed'.<sup>5</sup>

Each one of these essays is dedicated to one particular aspect or moment in the historical reconstruction of the complex passages that led Leonardo's

<sup>4</sup> Carlo Pedretti, ed., *Leonardo da Vinci: Libro di pittura*, transcribed by Carlo Vecce. Florence: Giunti, 1995.

<sup>5</sup> Claire Farago, Janis Bell, and Carlo Vecce, eds., *The Fabrication of Leonardo da Vinci's Trattato della pittura with a scholarly edition of the editio princeps (1651) and an annotated English translation*, with a foreword by Martin Kemp, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2018. xii.

autograph notes to the first printed edition in Paris: so complex a process that the editors cleverly indicated it with the appropriate term 'fabrication'. Often based on a micro-historical approach, these scholarly contributions explore the different modes of transmission of Leonardo's writings. Coherently, they are organized in a sequence that strategically reflects – by chronological developments and based on geographical coordinates – the multiple stages that led to the making of the *Libro di pittura* and, then, to the publication of the *Trattato della pittura*. Therefore, this series of essays examines, at first, the origins of Melzi's compilation, left incomplete at his death, in a period that runs between 1523 and 1570. Then, attention is given to the analytical investigation of the process of abridgement of the text, which probably occurred, according to Carlo Vecce's solid hypothesis, around 1530s and 1540s, and was further reelaborated, as Claire Farago demonstrates, around 1550s and 1560s. In the following chapters, the analysis moves toward the role performed by Cassiano dal Pozzo and his entourage of artists, editors, publishers and engravers, in the years between 1634 and 1643, in an investigation that closely considers also the participation of Nicolas Poussin and PierFrancesco Alberti in the realization of the drawings for that editorial project. Finally, the volume shifts its attention to a different context and examines the activities promoted by the French team composed by Raphaël Trichet du Fresne, Roland Chambray and Charles Errard between 1640 and 1651 in the preparation of the *Trattato*.

Thanks to the well planned and clearly thought arrangement of this remarkable collection of essays – which mirrors, in a symmetric way, the (four) main stages that paved the publication of the treatise in Paris – the reader may follow, without ever getting lost or feeling confused, the entangled narratives of these important moments in the history of the reception of Leonardo's ideas and their circulation, within an authentically European dimension, throughout the seventeenth century. As Claire Farago lucidly states in the Preface, this critical edition aims to investigate the tortuous ways in which Leonardo's notes 'were significantly reinterpreted over the eighty years leading up to [their] publication: how modern, initially European ideas of art came to have institutional authority; how Leonardo's treatise was adapted to Catholic Reformation needs around 1570; and how that same text was radically reconceptualized six decades later to educate artists eager to serve the seventeenth-century State through their mastery of anatomy, perspective, proportions, and all the other intellectually demanding and often highly technical subjects that had been introduced to the visual arts in the past century and before'.<sup>6</sup>

Examined as a whole, this collection of essays outlines, with outstanding critical acumen and exemplary historical accuracy, the gradual geographical expansion of Leonardo's teachings from the Italian origins of the *Libro della pittura* to the European repercussions of the *Trattato della pittura*. In strict connection with the historical goals of the present edition/translation, one must point out its careful

<sup>6</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*. xviii.

conceptual and lexical frame of reference. As a matter of fact, among the many excellent qualities of this editorial project conducted by Claire Farago and this compact group of scholars, one should mention the punctilious attention paid to the study of the semantic variations of words, concepts and categories, depending on the different hermeneutic contexts in which they were used, read and interpreted. In that regard, it is particularly praiseworthy the fact that all contributions that form these two volumes adopted a clear, coherent and uniform grid of terminological references and corresponding abbreviations to avoid any confusion in the citation of the various manuscripts examined. Just to mention an example easy to understand among non-academic or non-specialized audiences, while the 'abridged' version of Leonardo's writings is always designated by the title chosen by Melzi in his manuscript, that is, *Libro di pittura*, the Parisian *editio princeps* is correctly referred to as *Trattato di pittura*. This remark may sound rather obvious for most scholars, but the fact that this edition clarifies the (otherwise intertwined, labyrinthine and potentially confusing) nomenclature of Leonardo-related manuscripts, versions and editions, further enhances its rigorous philological agenda on every level, providing at the same time a critical apparatus that renders this publication accessible also to a wider range of readers, aside from specialists. Without assuming any lexical conformity or concordance derived from previous publications, the editors of this thoughtfully conceived project set all necessary parameters – from a historical, conceptual and philological perspective – in the preliminary pages of this very edition, thus rendering immediately perspicuous the myriad of concepts and materials related to Leonardo's writings as well as their fluctuations, alterations and different implications over time, within different cultural contexts. Clarity (in the explanations), caution (in the suggestion of new interpretive hypotheses) and consistency (in the use of a critical and aesthetic vocabulary associated with the various editions of Leonardo's writings): these three qualities constitute a most relevant – and welcome – leitmotiv in the entire publication.

Due to its impressive size, this editorial enterprise may appear daunting and overwhelming at first even among scholars who are familiar with the intricacies of what could be called the 'migrations of textual Leonardo.' After a short glimpse at the table of contents, however, the reader will realize at once that this critically conducted publication is not only coherently organized in its various parts, chapters, and appendixes, but also built up in order to establish a productive dialogue among the diverse essays collected in the first volume, thus revealing – if I may use a phonetic and metaphorical pun – the underneath 'fabric' that effectively describes and scrutinizes the 'fabrication' of Leonardo's *Trattato*, without creating an over-fragmented textual structure and, consequently, a historical and critical narrative that is difficult to follow. Quite the opposite, in spite of the complexity of its topics, this collection of essays creates a cohesive scholarly system, able to integrate also different opinions and different hypotheses.

If 'reception' is a key word to indicate the many qualities of this editorial achievement, so is 'dialogue'.

The first volume presents, in fact, a most compact, articulated and cohesive set of essays written by Claire Farago, Carlo Vecce, Matthew Landrus, Anna Sconza, Juliana Barone and Janis Bell. In the conclusion of this volume an appendix on 'The Visual Imagery of the Printed Editions of Leonardo's Treatise on Painting' was prepared by Mario Valentino Guffanti, who is also the responsible for most of the excellent photographic reproductions of the manuscripts that enrich the entire publication. Moreover, in his brief, but excellent contribution, Guffanti traces the history of the printed editions of the treatise until the nineteenth century, focusing, in particular, on the visual apparatus that accompanied each one of these publications, also underlining the editions that contained new or original illustrations in comparison to the *editio princeps*.

The general overview provided by Claire Farago offers a very meticulous reconstruction of the historical background in which one should consider the production as well as the circulation of Leonardo's *discorsi* through the creation of the various manuscripts dating from the sixteenth to the seventeenth century. In a very insightful manner, Farago's essay addresses – and convincingly answers – many relevant questions, such as: why so many years had passed between the preliminary stages of the editorial project in Rome around 1630s (dominated by the figure of Cassiano dal Pozzo) and its publication in Paris in 1651? Who were the sponsors of the French edition? What was the role played by Cardinal Richelieu and Christina of Sweden in this process? What was the political climate in France when the treatise was finally published? Is there any possible connection between the pedagogical agenda presented in the 1651 edition of the *Trattato* and the organization of the recently funded *Académie Royale de peinture et sculpture*? In the era of the Fronde, how was the publication of Leonardo's treatise perceived amid these struggles for institutional authority and power?

In a brilliant interpretive tour-de-force, Claire Farago provides one of the most exhaustive, analytical and persuasive reconstructions ever dedicated to the intricate history of the production of Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura*, while delineating also a most insightful, clear and beautifully written overview of the various narratives concerning the reception of this influential treatise since the sixteenth century. Furthermore, Farago addresses another crucial point in this history of this editorial adventure and examines the 1651 edition in relation to the virtuoso qualities of the images and decorations that accompany such a luxurious publication, to understand its pedagogical, ideological but also political implications in the context of mid-seventeenth-century France. The richness of this essay and the exemplary rigor of its philological approach, along with the impressive breadth of the issues that it raises and the originality of the answers that it provides, will certainly open a new stimulating chapter for further discussions and conversations among scholars and specialists, offering at the same

time a model for future publications and researches concerning the textual migrations of Leonardo's notes.

After Farago's general introduction, the first chapter by Carlo Vecce attentively examines the evidence regarding the earliest publication plans, preserved in Melzi's original manuscript compiled in Milan. In a series of rigorous philological remarks, Vecce presents a summary of the conclusions he had already reached in the excellent 1995 Italian edition of the *Codex Urbinas*, prepared in collaboration with Carlo Pedretti.<sup>7</sup> In this new contribution, however, Vecce addresses in a more detailed fashion the central question concerning the nature of the knowledge embodied in Leonardo's notes and, just as importantly, the different ways in which such a knowledge system might have operated through the net of textual circulation, with the constant reassessment of its ideas, concepts and practical advices.

More specifically, Vecce underlines the important fact that, within the dynamics of the workshop procedures, both the *Libro di pittura* as well as the *Trattato della pittura* intended to offer a horizon of theoretical references that were expected to be applied in direct association with a more 'practical' form of knowledge. In other words, Vecce suggests that the treatise – since its germinal stages by Leonardo's hands – should be read and interpreted as a converging point in which a systematic form of knowledge (or *episteme*) finds its ultimate goal in an applicable, practical know-how (or *phronesis*), thus developing the master's recurrent reflections on the interplay of *scienza* and *esperienza*. It is well-known, in fact, that the concept of experience constitutes a key notion in Leonardo's teachings. The study of the reception and the circulation of the autograph notes in the different contexts taken into consideration in this publication, allows for a much more articulated and historically circumscribed understanding of the complex combination of practice and theory or, to use the expression adopted by the editors of this volume, between 'artisanal knowledge' and its textual and visual modes of transmission in the circles in which the *Libro di pittura* and, afterwards, the *Trattato della pittura* were diffused.

This relevant topic is further explored by Claire Farago in the chapter 'Leonardo's Workshop Procedures and the *Trattato della pittura*', which begins with a close examination of the manuscript at the Institut de France, MS A, datable around 1490-1492, which forms the core of the *Libro di pittura* and constitutes its single largest source. Particularly enlightening in these pages is the confrontation between Leonardo's notes and Alberti's theories on painting and also their effective application in the analysis of the *Virgin of the Rocks* at the Musée du Louvre, especially in regard to the analysis of optical phenomena and the practical question of how Leonardo rendered the illusion of volume and three-dimensionality in this work by means of a masterful use of *rilievo* and *chiaroscuro*.

<sup>7</sup> See note 4.

The choice of the Paris painting as a case study allows Claire Farago to explore, in a concrete way, the process of dynamic exchanges that might have characterised Leonardo's workshop procedures and working methods. In line with the investigations undertaken by Luke Syson,<sup>8</sup> Farago sustains that a text-based collaboration might have been used to connect Leonardo with his assistants for 'it appears that the workshop members operated as a team on the basis of their shared knowledge of *chiaroscuro* rendered on optical principles'<sup>9</sup> and, consequently, the second version of the altarpiece (now in London) might have served as a most functional didactic tool for the master. Coherently, Farago claims that 'Leonardo took the opportunity of supplying a replacement painting to teach his students the lessons in *chiaroscuro*, *sfumato*, and *rilievo* recorded in MS A, which became the core of the pedagogical text of the *Trattato della pittura*.'<sup>10</sup> In other words, practice and theory, conceptual disquisitions and direct applications of these notions might have oriented Leonardo's attitude as a master and, accordingly, qualified his teaching agenda as well. The workshop might have operated, then, as an experimental laboratory for tests, in which the fields of theory and practice appeared profoundly intertwined: 'Without his guidance in the fabrication process using a combination of drawings, texts, and oral instruction, the subtleties recommended in his notes would have been difficult if not impossible to achieve from direct observation alone,' Farago succinctly remarks.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, based on the available evidence, one may advance the hypothesis 'that Leonardo developed a team approach to making duplicate paintings in his signature style',<sup>12</sup> after having gone through a training process that entailed the knowledge of his ideas as well as the familiarity with his pictorial procedures. Recalling Mary Pardo's remarks on Cennino Cennini's text,<sup>13</sup> Farago underlines the recursive character of the education system envisioned by Leonardo, describing the *Libro di pittura* as 'a modern workshop manual'.<sup>14</sup> In conclusion, the scholar perceptively observes that the structure of the *Libro* itself reflects the profound pedagogical intent of these notes: inflected by the humanist organization of Alberti's treatise on painting, the author of this compilation, Francesco Melzi, gave order to excerpts originally written by his master in various dates and assembled them according to a topic-sequence method, thus producing a

<sup>8</sup> Luke Syson, Larry Keith, and Johanna Stephenson, eds., *Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan*, London-New Have: Yale University Press, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 109.

<sup>10</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 111.

<sup>11</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 111.

<sup>12</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 111.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Pardo, 'Leonardo da Vinci on the Painter's Task: Memory/Imagination/Figuration,' in Claire Farago, ed., *Leonardo da Vinci and the Ethics of Style*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008, 58–95.

<sup>14</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 120.

manuscript that could be considered a workshop manual along the lines of Cennini's legacy. 'To an artist already familiar with the recursive strategies of workshop training, as Melzi himself was,' Farago comments, 'the organization of the *Libro di pittura*, and later the *Trattato*, might not have been as difficult to follow as it would prove for other, differently educated readers. That is, the repetitions due to the grouping of passages on similar themes could be understood in terms of a longstanding sequence of training that links Cennini to Leonardo to Melzi and beyond, structurally and historically. This sequence provides the student with techniques for selecting those features from three-dimensional reality that can be successfully reembodyed as a painting on a flat surface'.<sup>15</sup>

Another very important aspect of Leonardo's pedagogy and his attention toward the notions of *rilievo* and *chiaroscuro* in the making of a pictorial illusion is examined by Claire Farago in connection with a particular humanist tendency that she adequately calls 'artisanal epistemologies': that is to say, the impact of a natural, almost tangible and breathing rendering of images on the field of religious representations that sets together, once again, the parameters of theory and the inevitable constraints of the actual practice. Examining the purpose of attaining visual illusion in sacred paintings and stressing the intrinsic indexical quality of most pictorial signs, Farago provides a very stimulating analysis of Leonardo's notes on this topic, outlining, in particular, their validity and possible interpretations in the climate of post-Tridentine Europe, during which the *Libro* had been in fact compiled according to Farago's extended chronology.<sup>16</sup> 'In its Christian formulation, the "truth" of the artistic representation was crucial, for it justified the use of images in religious worship. [...] Leonardo's virtual treatment of charged materials arguably attests to their continued presence in sacred images and objects in the era of optical naturalism as carrying significance to an informed audience through their direct presentation: their visuality goes far beyond their visualness *per se*'.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 121.

<sup>16</sup> As it has been already noted, Farago provides an insightful extension of Vecce's chronology for the *Libro*, examining its reception until 1570s and pointing out, in particular, changes in the manuscripts that could be better understood and explained within the climate of the new censorial strictness associated with the Tridentine era.

<sup>17</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 133. It is very interesting to note how this argument finds its way also in another very insightful paragraph written in a different chapter of the book, centered on the concept of 'artless art': in reference to ideas promoted by Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti on the appropriate use of images within religious settings, Farago reminds that the 'artifice organizes the worshiper; that is, the formal elements of the painted image determine the subject's affective response and help to constitute his or her social world. The viewer's individual experience is never saturated, because new visual discoveries and associations are always possible. In fact,' she concludes, 'the openness of the signifying process keeps the beholder engaged', in Farago, *Fabrication*, 229.

Farago's essay echoes the major qualities of this whole editorial project, providing a remarkable example of scholarship, accompanied by thought-provoking critical insights and supported by well-documented historical evidences: all qualities that, put together, further emphasize the impressive breadth of topics and issues discussed in this chapter. The reflections on the theme of artisanal epistemology or the dynamics of theory and practice in relation to the concrete path of education of the artists – a topic also addressed by Vecce in his brilliant essay and mentioned by Kemp in his Foreword – constitute a recurrent leitmotiv throughout this publication and emerges, side by side with the central theme of the reception of Leonardo's notes, as the authentic critical epicenter of this stunning editorial enterprise.

The next contribution – an essay written by Matthew Landrus – explores the most relevant body of surviving evidence of Leonardo's teachings on painting, which was not included in Melzi's compilation, that is to say, the drawings, diagrams and notes that form the manuscript known as *Regole del disegno* and more generally referred to as Codex Huygens, compiled – between 1560 and 1580 – by Carlo Urbino da Crema, one of Melzi's associates who might have been directly involved also in the compilation of the *Libro di pittura*. Landrus examines with rigour, intelligence and attention Carlo Urbino's *Regole* in the attempt to offer a tangible example of how the reception of Leonardo's methods and ideas has entailed a process of refinement and expansion of the master's original goals. Furthermore, Landrus provides also concrete evidence of the 'intended and unintended content for a book on painting and human movements'.<sup>18</sup> In order to provide a functional case study of these developments, the scholar undertakes a very meticulous comparative analysis of 'forty-three pages of Urbino's *Regole* with autograph Leonardo drawings and three drawings by Francesco Melzi,' concluding that 'Urbino's interpretations and representations of those notes preserves a portion of Leonardo's book «on painting and human movements», some of which editors included in the 1651 *Trattato*'.<sup>19</sup>

In his penetrating essay, Landrus examines the various ways in which Urbino's *Regole* developed a canon of human proportions that expanded on the fifteenth-century diagrams and studies that included the Vitruvian Man, a topic – as the scholar does not neglect to point out – not examined in Melzi's compilation. After providing other equally relevant examples to sustain his argument, Landrus challenges the results of previous scholarship on this subject and convincingly concludes that these 'new comparisons between the *Codex Huygens* and Leonardo's work show that Urbino incorporated more of Leonardo's approach than previous studies suggested'.<sup>20</sup> Landrus goes so far as to claim that in some cases 'precise proportional comparisons give evidence that Urbino directly copied an original,

<sup>18</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 183.

<sup>19</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 185.

<sup>20</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 188.

and all of the comparisons identify significant conceptual similarities between Urbino's interpretation and Leonardo's original'.<sup>21</sup> A corroborating example of such a close borrowing and visual proximity between Urbino and Leonardo can be seen, for instance, in those cases in which Leonardo's representation of the Vitruvian Man were copied, studied and further developed by Melzi's assistant. Thanks to a very close reading of Leonardo's original pages and, in particular, of his drawing now in Venice, Landrus was able to verify that 'the seven-foot delineations on the drawing are not marked in ink but are instead incised with metal stylus marks that he or a subsequent individual made with a compass along the figure, and are not visible to the naked eye. My superimposition of red dots and lines on the image locates metal stylus marks I observed in person with a raking light.'<sup>22</sup> To conclude: in Landrus' essay philologically impeccable premises and critically acute modes of inquiry productively combined the parameters of textual studies with a punctilious, attentive investigation of drawings and manuscripts conducted in accordance with methods usually adopted among art historians. Moreover, at the end of his essay, the scholar attaches a very useful table of concordance between the illustrations from the Codex Huygens and the drawings made by Leonardo and his associates.

### **All roads lead to Rome (as well as to Casteldurante and Paris): the narratives of transformation from Melzi's *Libro* to Du Fresne's *Trattato***

After having explored the manuscript sources for the 1651 edition of the *Trattato della pittura*, examining, from a philological perspective, structure, aims and characteristics of the 'lost book' on painting and human movements as well as the distinctive features of the compilation made by Francesco Melzi, the next chapters of this volume shift their focus of attention towards the study of the reception of the *Libro* and the proliferation of copies in contexts such as sixteenth-century Urbino, Casteldurante, Florence and seventeenth-century Rome, before diving into the analysis of the cultural milieu of Paris in 1640s. It has been already pointed out that the essays collected in this volume are not simply arranged according to what could be called a chronological sequence, but, more elaborately, they appear thematically organized in a way that helps the reader to understand the interconnectedness of the myriad of problems, issues and topics related to the 'fabrication' of the *Trattato*. To use a Renaissance paradigm, one may argue that it is, indeed, the threads of an intellectual 'conversation' that productively amalgamates the scholarly 'fabric' of this outstanding critical edition.

A good example of such a promising dialogue – or a modern version of the Renaissance model of *conversazione* – that creates unity and cohesiveness amongst

<sup>21</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 189.

<sup>22</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 23.

the various essays can be seen, for instance, in the integration of the chronological hypotheses suggested by Vecce and further examined Farago regarding the preparation of Francesco Melzi's compilation. While Vecce provides strong evidences to date it around 1530s and 1540s, primarily on the basis of a comparative analysis of Melzi's handwriting, confronted also with the changes introduced by an anonymous corrector directly on the Codex Urbinas, Farago underlines the continual reelaboration of – and the new implications carried out by – this manuscript between 1550s and 1560s, in concomitance with the new religious and ethical climate of the Council of Trent, 'a period of mounting concern with moral values loosely associated with Church reform in Venice, Milan, Florence, Rome, and elsewhere'.<sup>23</sup> With persuasive arguments, Farago first acknowledges and then further elaborates on Vecce's chronology for the manuscript, providing a series of evidences to stress, in particular, the fact that the ultimate goal of her research was 'to recover the initial concrete circumstances in which Francesco Melzi's *Libro di pittura* circulated, in the lived experience of those named and anonymous agents in the historical record'.<sup>24</sup>

Manuscripts of this abridged text are recorded in circulation since 1582, date of the earliest copy known today. Emphasizing that 'Church reform in post-Tridentine Italy provides the best context' for understanding how the abridged text came to be, Farago deduces that 'the manuscript might have been somewhere else besides Melzi's study when the editor who originally abridged it did his work'<sup>25</sup> and calls attention to the significant fact that Melzi's manuscript first appears in the inventory compiled in Casteldurante after the death of Duke Francesco Maria II della Rovere in 1631. Moreover, the scholar points out that a second inventory dated 1632 confirms that Melzi's original entered into the possession of Pope Urban VIII around those years. However, the most innovative direction of research in Claire Farago's essays lies perhaps in the attention devoted to the role played by Cardinal Taddeo Barberini in the dynamics of circulation of the Codex Urbinas, since the cardinal – a nephew of Urban VIII – is described as a man who was 'particularly interested in recovering the manuscripts from Casteldurante'.<sup>26</sup>

Other contexts were equally important in the dissemination of Leonardo's writings and teachings. The favorable reception of his ideas in a period dominated

<sup>23</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 216.

<sup>24</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 213. Another very clear example of intellectual collaboration and, once again, productive exchange of ideas can be seen in the recurrent attempt at examining the process of transmission of knowledge through theoretical reflections and practical advices that one may find in Leonardo's writings: both Martin Kemp and Claire Farago point out the different ways in which the kind of knowledge accumulated in the workshops were often combined with business enterprises and also institutionalized forms of pedagogy, such as the ones promoted by the French Academy.

<sup>25</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 219.

<sup>26</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 230.

by the notions of religious values and moral decorum such as the post-Tridentine Italy, especially in Federico Borromeo's Milan, might have stimulated the circulation of Leonardo's art theory, centered on the achievement of a canon of representation based on the masterful adoption of effects of shadows, lights and a smooth rendering, or *sfumato*, in order to attain a natural aspect of the images, further enriched by means of a persuasive expression of *affetti*: 'Leonardo's emphasis on achieving beautiful effects in rendering light, shadow, and color would certainly give his sacred images the kinds of qualities that Borromeo sought in his own devotional practice, where he ostensibly remained focused on the representation rather than on the artist's virtuosity.'<sup>27</sup>

Within this frame of historical references, Farago analyses the many cancellations, abbreviations and censored passages that one may find in certain copies of Melzi's text, including the most curious choice to eliminate any depictions of animals. According to Farago, the 'likely reason for eliminating references to animals around 1570 follows directly the Council of Trent's Decree on Images, which specified that nothing extraneous to the biblical narrative should be included in a sacred work of art'.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the decision to limit – if not to avoid altogether – the representation of animals in religious images is intelligently tied also to Borromeo's programmatic advice that 'no beasts of burden, dogs, fish, or other animals [should be] shown in a church or sacred place unless the iconography of sacred history and church custom necessitates otherwise'.<sup>29</sup> For all of these reasons, in the conclusion of her insightful essay, Claire Farago refers to the abridged *Libro di pittura* as a 'Catholic Reformation text' due to the fact that the 'abridger's changes suggest that he was attempting to conform to new policies for the arts promoted by the Council of Trent directly connected to the situation unfolding in Milan around the time of Melzi's death, when Borromeo began to institute reforms'.<sup>30</sup>

Very different is the Florentine context investigated by Anna Sconza in her essay. In Florence one may find some of the earliest known copies of the *Libro di pittura* and, in fact, some of the oldest manuscripts of the 'abridged version' might have been produced in the inner circle of Grand Duke Cosimo I, as Sconza argues. Furthermore, some of the surviving copies came directly from the libraries of art *connoisseurs* and art collectors such as Carlo Concini, Niccolò Gaddi and Gian Vincenzo Pinelli. In line with recent explorations on the anthropological implications of the 'gift culture' and its place in art historical narratives, Sconza

<sup>27</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 230.

<sup>28</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 231.

<sup>29</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 232.

<sup>30</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 235.

insightfully suggests that these manuscripts might have been considered as precious items for social exchange.<sup>31</sup>

Overall, Anna Sconza provides a carefully conducted analysis of specific manuscripts and examines their illustrations in a very attentive way as well, offering constant reflections from a methodological standpoint, especially regarding philological procedures and exegetic issues. Particularly worth noting is her persuasive plea on the necessity to undertake object-centered investigations, focused on the remaining manuscripts and copies of the *Libro di pittura* on an individual, case-per-case basis, in the attempt to avoid pointless, misleading generalizations: 'Past scholars have tended to rely on a few predetermined *exempla* or "tests" (*loci critici*) established by Carlo Pedretti. These "tests" allowed Pedretti to draw a hypothetical genealogy of the manuscripts preceding the 1651 publication by identifying two main branches of transmission, one according to the correctness of the text ("type ii") and the other according to the correctness of the illustrations ("type A"). This kind of comparative study, limited to the test cases, inevitably reduces the complexity and richness of the philological analysis, to which every manuscript study should contribute. The situation is especially acute regarding the *Book on Painting*, which underwent changes for nearly a century, during which its cultural context varied greatly. Only a philological analysis of the entire text of the nearly fifty surviving manuscripts could assess the importance of each copy and establish the level of "contamination" that occurred among different branches of this manuscript tradition'.<sup>32</sup>

While in the previous chapter, Claire Farago had investigated the origins of the abridged version within the interpretive context of the Catholic Reformation, Anna Sconza's study provides an in-depth philological analysis of early manuscripts circulating in Florence, convincingly sorting out the relationship among copies that, prior to her study, had never been arranged in a linear chronological sequence before.

By examining the initial process of the abridgement of Leonardo's notes, Sconza's contribution adequately prepares, within the economy of this outstanding collection of essays, the historical territory that will be explored by Juliana Barone in the following chapter, centred on Cassiano dal Pozzo's editorial campaign for the publication of treatise around the 1630s. As Barone comments, Cassiano's project 'marks a crucial moment in the history of the preparation of Leonardo's treatise on painting for publication. What is more, it was in his project that there emerged a remarkable contrast between how the written and visual materials were treated, a contrast that is not due simply to the long transmission process. As will become apparent, Cassiano's project aimed at rescuing textual accuracy, while the

<sup>31</sup> For an excellent example of this stimulating field of research see Genevieve Warwick, *The Arts of Collecting. Padre Sebastiano Resta and the Market for Drawings in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 251.

illustrations offered a different visual message in the service of a new aesthetic ideal'.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, she discusses the transformations of the textual and the visual materials of the abridged *Libro* in relation to the activities promoted by the circle of artists, engravers, publishers and editors who worked for Dal Pozzo, whose most relevant result is the manuscript known as H228 at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan.

Very innovative in Barone's approach is the close examination of the different ways in which text and image were treated in Cassiano's project: an editorial campaign that would orient some of the main lines followed during the preparation of the 1651 *editio princeps*. To begin with, Barone points out that many artists, intellectuals and commissioners were already familiar with Leonardo's abridged notes in Rome since 1580s and examines, in particular, copies of the *Libro di pittura* that may have contributed to the transmission of Leonardo's ideas in town since the last decades of the sixteenth century. This is the case, for instance, of the manuscript that used to belong to the Florentine monk and painter Damaso Salterelli: produced in Florence around 1600–1625, 'this manuscript not only made its way to Rome but also became known among Cassiano's editorial team members in the city: direct examination of it has recently revealed the presence of a well-known Dal Pozzo watermark on a sheet that was added to the original manuscript'.<sup>34</sup>

That evidence corroborates the fact that, within the Roman context, Cassiano's attraction for the theoretical legacy of Leonardo was not exceptional. However, as Barone opportunely observes, while not exclusive, 'Cassiano's interest in Leonardo is not simply consistent with his editorial activities. It is also linked to his wider intellectual curiosity in science and, as we will see, to his particular attention to the antique, elements which played a fundamental role in the directions taken by his project'.<sup>35</sup>

In this essay, the acumen of critical hypotheses is successfully combined with the rigour of well-applied philological premises, as one can notice in the stunning fastidiousness, diligence and lucidity with which the scholar scrutinises MS H228. In addition to such a philological depth, one of the major achievements of Barone's essay lies in its focus on the role performed by Nicola Poussin in the creation of the images that were later adapted to be printed in the 1651 edition. Barone strenuously underlines the 'striking novelty' of Poussin's visual codes and describes quite meticulously the elegant, classical-oriented depictions of the human figures created by the French artist, without neglecting to call the reader's attention to the fact that these exquisite *all'antica* images 'served a new aesthetic ideal and

<sup>33</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 263.

<sup>34</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 267.

<sup>35</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 268.

played a vital role in the visual reshaping of the seventeenth-century Leonardo for publication'.<sup>36</sup>

By programmatically adopting classical models in his illustrations for the abridged version, Poussin deliberately used 'visual references actually extrinsic to Leonardo's *Libro di pittura*. Before him, the differences in the human figure illustrations in the manuscript copies were mainly due to the transmission process and to the varying accuracy and dexterity of the copyist or artist in the rendering of the figures. By contrast, what distinguishes Poussin's human figures is that he does not limit himself to using the manuscript copies as sources. Instead, he makes conscious use of the antique as a key visual reference for designing his figures, and, in so doing, he expressly creates a new visual message of Leonardo's teachings'.<sup>37</sup> In offering a classicizing interpretation of Leonardo's teachings, Poussin's images have certainly contributed to bring the theoretical legacy of the Renaissance master closer to the aesthetic expectations, the taste and the pedagogical aims shared by the French connoisseurs, artists, publishers and editors who would be working together, for over two decades, in the laborious making – or 'fabrication' – of the 1651 edition. Thanks to Barone's fruitful research, new light was shed on the Roman latitude of Leonardo's reception, before reaching its final destination: Paris.

No wonder if this stimulating French context will be the core of Janis Bell's brilliant essay, in which she offers a remarkably detailed, insightful and rigorous reconstruction of the procedures adopted in the making of the 1651 *editio princeps*, examining very closely the specific contributions of Raphaël Trichet du Fresne (in the capacity of editor), Roland Chambray (in quality of collaborator and financial backer of the project) and Charles Errard (painter to the king and founding member of the *Académie royale*, who played, according to Bell, a crucial role in the elaboration of the 1651 publication). This essay has also the merit of bringing up questions that any well-informed reader should take into account to understand the text as a historical audience might have understood it, especially from a lexical and conceptual point of view. To achieve such a goal, Janis Bell provides excellent explanations of the terminology adopted in the *Trattato*, for example, in the sections devoted to the studies of optical phenomena and the description of human movement.

As the conclusive chapter of this impressive volume, Bell's essay offers a significant contribution to the analysis of the process of circulation and transformation not only of the 'abridged' text, but also of the illustrations that were made to accompany it, from the schematic drawings present in early Florentine and Roman manuscripts to the innovative pen and wash images elaborated by Nicolas Poussin around 1630s. In regard to the study of the visual components of the *Trattato*, it is thanks to Bell's investigations if we can now understand, in a

<sup>36</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 284.

<sup>37</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 288.

much more articulated and contextualized way, the relevant part played by Charles Errard as the inventor of the graphic design of that exquisite edition as well as the dynamics of his collaboration with Du Fresne and Chambray as a team.

Conducting a systematic comparative analysis and a very meticulous philological study of the 1651 edition, Janis Bell centers her focus of interest on the final stages that led to the imposing publication of the *Trattato della pittura* in Paris, paying particular attention to omissions, corrections and additions provided by Raphaël Trichet du Fresne on the manuscript created by the circle of Cassiano dal Pozzo. The magnitude of these changes suggests, according to Bell, that both Du Fresne and Chambray must have prepared a working manuscript (still unknown or lost) to coordinate the numerous alterations in terms of sequence, numeration, titles and illustrations, aside from the many changes of words and phrases that one may find in the printed text. Thanks to the methodic comparison of particular manuscripts (such as MS H 228 at the Ambrosiana and MS OR-11706 at the Hermitage) and through a close investigation of the different handwritings of the annotations, Bell was able to detect 'a striking similarity between the penmanship of these manuscripts and others prepared in the Dal Pozzo workshop'.<sup>38</sup> However, she also notices that the handwriting does not match Dal Pozzo's in all cases and, consequently, she concludes that there are 'indeed similarities in the handwriting of Freart de Chambray *and* to that of his brother, Freart de Chantelou'.<sup>39</sup> Cautiously, she leaves the question of autography opened due to the lack of decisive evidences.

Another aspect that remains unclear is the precise chronology of these emendations. Bell asserts that 'in the end, we are left with the conclusion that the emendations [in the manuscript at the Hermitage] were entered in Rome, but at several different times to account for the disparities, some predating b1 and some after'.<sup>40</sup> Coherently, she claims that Du Fresne might have used 'various manuscripts' to prepare the 1651 edition, as the editor himself had candidly asserted.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand, the scholar recalls that Du Fresne 'became involved in the project much earlier, and had the opportunity to consult a manuscript in Italy, where he is documented several times during the 1640s in Rome'.<sup>42</sup> No wonder, then, if Du Fresne is quite insightfully designated in this essay as 'a textual editor with a vision',<sup>43</sup> since his goal seems to have been extremely consistent throughout the entire project in the attempt 'to make sense of Leonardo's text, to fix the grammar, punctuation, orthography, and wording so that his readers could benefit from its precepts. In pursuing this goal, he often

<sup>38</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 314.

<sup>39</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 315.

<sup>40</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 317.

<sup>41</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 328.

<sup>42</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 328.

<sup>43</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 331.

made changes in words and phrases that, in many cases, had been corrupted through copying errors. He “pruned,” completed “truncated arguments,” and consulted other manuscripts to “restore” the text to something worthy of Leonardo's name. While he did not succeed in recovering Leonardo's original in every case, he made a significant contribution to the readability and accuracy of the text'.<sup>44</sup>

Along with her investigations on the actual – or potential – extension of Du Fresne's interventions in the 1651 edition, Janis Bell also explores, with similar rigour, the part played by Charles Errard in the realization of the rich set of illustrations that embellishes the *editio princeps*. Basing her interpretation on the evidence of the close connection between Du Fresne and Errard, Bell reverses the opinion commonly shared among scholars that tended to emphasise Poussin's contributions in detriment of the ‘substantial role in the conceptualization and fabrication of the book’ performed by Errard.<sup>45</sup>

Regarding the engravers who might have worked with Errard, Bell sheds new light on the participation of Georges Tournier. Given his collaboration in the making of engraved copperplates for previous works designed by Errard, Bell maintains that ‘it is likely that Errard continued to employ him to engrave copperplates for the *Trattato* edition’<sup>46</sup> as well, while the name of Jean Couvay is convincingly set aside as a potential collaborator for the 1651 project. Moreover, Bell stresses the creative side of Errard's intervention, thus reassessing the remarks of previous scholars who had characterized this artist as a rather passive and impersonal translator of images designed by Poussin. Bell emphasizes, on the contrary, Errard's agency in the inventive process that led to the creation of the illustrations of the *Trattato*, pointing out, as a corroborating element, the many changes made by him in the images that had been previously conceived by Poussin in the attempt to modernize the settings by designing deep spaces for the figures: ‘Without diminishing the ancient references and the exemplary nature of Poussin's figures, he chose to place them in pictorial settings closer to those of contemporary pictorial practice, as if to comment, “this is how the precept is useful to us today”’.<sup>47</sup> As a consequence of such a compositional enhancement, Errard further enriched the didactic value of the illustrations in the printed edition, fitting the purpose of the images to their envisioned use as teaching tools for the newly recognised *Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture*.

In conclusion, this critical edition of the *Trattato della pittura*, accompanied by an excellent English translation and a very compact, interconnected and rigorous collection of essays, seals with its carefully planned, well organized and functional textual structure, one of the most relevant publications realized in

<sup>44</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 332.

<sup>45</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 339.

<sup>46</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 340.

<sup>47</sup> Farago, *Fabrication*, 358.

Ricardo De Mambro Santos      The fabric of evidence: reconstructing the  
history of Leonardo's *Trattato della pittura* ...

concomitance with the 500th celebration of Leonardo da Vinci's passing. By providing a punctual series of philologically conducted analyses of Leonardo's autograph notes and offering critically articulated interpretations, corroborated by micro-historical reconstructions of the dialogue among the various manuscripts, from the compilation of the *Libro* to the publication of the *Trattato*, the present edition marks a truly exceptional achievement in the field of Leonardo's studies, on account of its historical breadth, methodological rigor, intellectual acumen and scholarly conscientiousness. In a stunning hermeneutic tour-de-force, in a well-ordered vortex of ideas and suggestions, this edition reaches – without any doubt – one of the highest peaks in the history of the scholarly-oriented investigations thus far devoted to Leonardo's teachings and writings, offering a critical edition that Julius von Schlosser himself would have enthusiastically acclaimed and promptly included in his *Kunstliteratur*.

**Ricardo De Mambro Santos** is Professor of Art History and Film Studies at Willamette University (Salem, Oregon). In addition to having taught Art Literature and Criticism for over a decade at the University of Rome and, as a Visiting Professor, at the University of Washington, Whitman College and the Tokyo International University of America, he has curated various exhibitions of Renaissance and Contemporary art both in Europe as well as in the United States. He is the author of several books and articles, including essays on Leonardo da Vinci, Giorgio Vasari, Karel van Mander and Hendrick Goltzius, along with publications dedicated to Film Studies (Federico Fellini, in particular) and Art Historiography (Julius von Schlosser, Erwin Panofsky, and Tzvetan Todorov).

[rdemambr@willamette.edu](mailto:rdemambr@willamette.edu)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)