VISUAL CULTURE IN EARLY MODERNITY

ROUTLEDGE

Federico Barocci

Inspiration and Innovation in Early Modern Italy

EDITED BY

Judith W. Mann,
Saint Louis Art Museum

An **Ashgate** Book

Federico Barocci

Reviewers of a recent exhibition termed Federico Barocci (ca. 1533–1612), 'the greatest artist you've never heard of'. One of the first original iconographers of the Counter Reformation, Barocci was a remarkably inventive religious painter and draftsman, and the first Italian artist to incorporate extensive color into his drawings. The purpose of this volume is to offer new insights into Barocci's work and to accord this artist, the dates of whose career fall between the traditional Renaissance and Baroque periods, the critical attention he deserves. Employing a range of methodologies, the essays include new ideas on Barocci's masterpiece, the *Entombment of Christ*; fresh thinking about his use of color in his drawings and innovative design methods; insights into his approach to the nude; revelations on a key early patron; a consideration of the reasons behind some of his most original iconography; an analysis of his unusual approach to the marketing of his pictures; an exploration of some little-known aspects of his early production, such as his reliance on Italian majolica and contemporary sculpture in developing his compositions; and an examination of a key Barocci document, the post mortem inventory of his studio. A translated transcription of the inventory is included as an appendix.

Judith W. Mann is Curator of European Art to 1800 at the Saint Louis Art Museum, USA.

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This volume is the happy culmination of a gathering of friends and colleagues in St. Louis in January of 2013 to talk about Federico Barocci. It was planned together with Babette and Carol Plazzotta, my teammates on the exhibition and my sage advisors on the symposium. I also must extend appreciation to Virginia Napoleone, the McKrindle Fellow at the National Gallery, London, who was also part of our team. The symposium was a huge success, and to that I owe thanks not just to Babette and Carol, but to the other speakers (and now authors) as well. I should also extend my gratitude to Suzanne Folds McCullagh who wasn't able to participate in the volume, but who offered her insights into Barocci's process with us at the conference. Finally, I should thank Claire Barry, who joined us for the panel discussion at the end of the last session, where she shared her deep understanding of the process and materials of Old Master technique.

Appreciation is also due to several people who supported the symposium in various ways, including George Wachter, Christopher Apostle, and Jason Herrick from Sotheby's who hosted a lovely dinner. Enormous thanks are also due to Mark Weil and Joan Hall who opened their home and generously welcomed our group. I also want to thank BMO Private Bank, Sotheby's, and the Missouri Arts Council, a state agency, who provided support for the exhibition and symposium.

As with any such event, it only happened through the hard work and kind spirits of many wonderful staff people at the Saint Louis Art Museum and Washington University in St. Louis. The symposium took place when the Museum was undergoing a major expansion and renovation project. The Barocci exhibition had the dubious distinction of being the last exhibition to be mounted in the former Special Exhibition Galleries in our venerable Cass Gilbert building. It proved a good thing given the sympathetic proportions and architectural detail that served the pictures quite well. The timing meant, however, that we had no auditorium. We were fortunate to have generously collegial friends at Washington University in St. Louis who allowed us the use of their facilities. For that, we are very appreciative, especially to Carmon Colangelo, Dean of the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts. I must also thank Elizabeth Childs, Etta and Mark Steinberg Professor of Art History, Department of Art History and Archaeology, School of Arts and Sciences, who makes any collaborative effort memorable and rewarding.

Hosting an off-site event added to the workload for a number of SLAM employees, most notably the research assistant who was the backbone of the effort,

Chris Naffziger. I am not sure he understood what he was in for when he started working on the Barocci exhibition back in 2008, dedicated as he was to museum work and to the study of sixteenth-century Italian art. Restaurant reservations, van schedules, and the inevitable last-minute schedule changes were probably not on his radar. He met the challenges cheerfully and resourcefully, to the benefit of all.

A number of our staff members were very involved and enormously helpful, including Sabrena Nelson, our former Head of Adult Programs, who shouldered a lot of the work, along with cherished colleagues Narni Cahill and Bill Appleton (Bill and Narni have both moved on). Jeanne Rosen, a former assistant in the curatorial division who now works in the Director's Office, was also part of the dedicated team who insured the success of the symposium through her incredibly kind spirit and warm heart. I must also thank the many hours of time that Linda Thomas, our former Assistant Director of Collections and Exhibitions, and our former Exhibitions assistant Molly Perse put into the planning, logistics, and moral support for the conference.

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On a personal note, I want to thank my family who help me keep my balance and who nurture my soul. Our family has expanded since the project began. Oscar Paul (who was born the day the Barocci exhibition opened) has been joined by Eleanor Judith, both the utterly adorable offspring of my daughter Madeleine and her husband Aram. They delight us all, including their wonderful uncle Bill. Most of all, I want to thank my husband, David Konig, whose erudition and keen intellect are only surpassed by his good heart and boundless love.

Note to readers

This volume is intended to accompany the catalogue for the 2012–2013 Barocci exhibition, Judith W. Mann and Babette Bohn with Carol Plazzotta, *Federico Barocci: Renaissance Master of Color and Line*. Exh. cat., St. Louis: Saint Louis Art Museum, with Yale University Press, 2012. Unless otherwise specified, all catalogue entries cited in this essay reference that catalogue. Furthermore, decisions concerning the illustration of some of Barocci's work in the current publication were based on what was readily available to readers in that volume. Works that are illustrated in the exhibition catalogue are noted with the catalogue or figure number in parenthesis.

1 Introduction

New insights into Federico Barocci's Senigallia *Entombment* and suggestions on his late workshop practice

Babette Bohn and Judith W. Mann

Barocci and the recent exhibition

This book of essays is devoted to Federico Barocci (ca. 1533–1612), the greatest Italian artist of his generation and a remarkably inventive religious painter and draftsman. Patronized throughout his lifetime by the duke of his native Urbino, Barocci became known as a distinguished religious painter, producing important works for churches in Urbino and the surrounding region as well as in Rome and other Italian cities. One of the first original iconographers of the Catholic Reformation, Barocci developed compelling and influential imagery for traditional religious narratives, such as the Annunciation, and complicated religious themes such as the Immaculate Conception. He was also the first Italian artist to incorporate extensive color into his drawings, employing pastel and oil paint in his beautiful preparatory studies for paintings.

In spite of his innovations, apart from a few fine modern publications,[1] he has not received the critical attention or popular recognition that he deserves, for several reasons. Barocci spent most of his life in Urbino, far from major art centers, and the dates of his career fall between the traditional Renaissance and Baroque periods. His surviving oeuvre as a painter is relatively small (about 70 pictures), and most of his extant paintings are in Italy, many of them in remote locations in the Marches. Furthermore, for mid-twentieth-century scholars who were beginning to investigate the dynamic baroque styles of his successors, the sweetness of Barocci's aesthetic was less appealing than the exuberant styles of such artists as Caravaggio and Guercino. For modern audiences for whom Caravaggio is now a household word, it may come as a shock to learn that Barocci was often more appreciated by his contemporaries, as evidenced by his considerably higher prices, which averaged more than two and a half times Caravaggio's typical compensation.[2]

In January 2013, the Saint Louis Art Museum invited a group of scholars to participate in a symposium in conjunction with *Federico Barocci: Renaissance Master*, an exhibition that opened in St. Louis (Oct. 21, 2012–Jan. 20, 2013) and subsequently traveled to the National Gallery London (Feb. 27, 2013–May 19, 2013) for its second and final venue.[3] The project was initially conceived as a monographic exhibition to highlight the beauty and power of Barocci's paintings. Due both to loan limitations and to the recognition that Barocci was a prolific

draftsman who experimented with new media, invented novel preparatory instruments, and produced more preliminary studies for his paintings than any other Italian Renaissance artist, the exhibition was reformulated to focus on his fascinating preparatory process.[4] In consequence, most of the 109 drawings and eight oil sketches of heads shown at the two venues were selected to illustrate the artist's preparation of individual paintings, primarily focusing on the 23 chosen for display. The symposium, designed to complement the exhibition, was part of the Saint Louis Art Museum's commitment to providing varied opportunities for scholars and the general public to learn about this under-appreciated master. The symposium papers dealt with topics about the artist that were not addressed in the show itself and expanded on some of the questions raised by the exhibition, leading us to the conclusion that we should publish them in another volume. Moreover, since the exhibition itself had inspired new insights into Barocci, we welcomed the opportunity to develop and refine our earlier discoveries, as recorded in the catalogue, in an updated publication. The *Entombment of Christ* (Color Plate 1) was one painting that occasioned much discussion and debate during the course of the exhibition. Our reconsideration of that work in this essay illustrates how scholarship based on insights gleaned from an exhibition but completed after it closes can yield new understanding.

The *Entombment* as the culmination of Barocci's early career

Barocci's *Entombment of Christ*, an altarpiece completed in 1582 for the Chiesa della Croce in the seaside town of Senigallia, encapsulates many of his most important accomplishments as a designer of religious paintings. By the late 1560s, Barocci had blossomed into the most naturalistic painter of his generation, an achievement predicated upon the artist's increasing reliance on drawing from life. Barocci had also honed his skills as a designer of dramatically effective compositions and emotionally diversified figures, as is first evident in the *Deposition* altarpiece of 1568–69 for the Cathedral of San Lorenzo in Perugia (Color Plate 2), arguably his first masterpiece.[5] The numerous preparatory studies, focusing in particular on the emotional faces and dramatically posed extremities, anticipate many aspects of the later *Entombment*. The same may be said of the *Deposition*'s masterful composition, which breaks up the expressive individual figures into smaller, balanced groups and unifies everyone into a larger, X-shaped design. As in all of Barocci's mature compositions, none of the subgroups within this overall arrangement could be eliminated without compromising the sense of harmony in the picture. Christ's extended right arm, still nailed to the Cross, is paralleled by the extended left arm of Saint Bernardino below and by the backward tilt of the adjacent young soldier on a ladder; the circular group of gesticulating women in the foreground offsets the verticality of the male figures above them; and so it goes. Such integrated designs were devised as the result of a lengthy preparatory process that included many compositional studies, including no less than ten early compositional sketches for the *Deposition,* probably only a fraction of the number the artist originally created. The *Deposition* is the first of Barocci's altarpieces to have been designed in 50 or more extant preliminary drawings, a truly staggering number when compared to the production of other Renaissance artists, testament to his lengthy design process that culminates, in many respects, in his *Entombment*.[6]

Commissioned by the Confraternity of the Santissimo Sacramento e della Croce for its church in Senigallia, the *Entombment of Christ* was one of the artist's most famous paintings—so admired by other artists, in fact, that enthusiastic copyists seriously damaged the work early in its history, necessitating Barocci's restoration of the picture in 1607–1608. The *Entombment* was the centerpiece of the exhibition in St. Louis, where it occupied an entire gallery, together with selected preparatory studies and other related works. The decision to highlight this painting stemmed from several motivations. To begin with, it is one of the most breathtakingly beautiful paintings the artist ever created, a symphony of richly varied colors and emotionally expressive figures, grouped gracefully and rhythmically around the pale body of the dead Christ and set into an evocative landscape. The work capped Barocci's early career and marked his emergence as one of the premier painters of sixteenth-century Italy. Stylistically and iconographically, the picture both demonstrates Barocci's links to earlier Raphaelesque traditions and illustrates his originality, a synthesis of the old and the new that is at the heart of his artistry.[7] Moreover, the 50 surviving preparatory studies associated with the painting represent the most diverse and innovative group related to any of Barocci's works. The exhibition included 13 of them, as well as three other works connected with the altarpiece. Since the goal of the exhibition was to examine how Barocci used drawings in the preparation of his finished works, it made sense to focus on a picture for which he developed new and varied instruments for devising and refining his composition.

The repainting of the *Entombment* as an indicator of Barocci's late workshop practices

The alleged repainting of the *Entombment* in Barocci's studio in 1607–1608 adds to the interesting character of this picture.[8] Several visitors to the exhibition observed that it bore little resemblance to Barocci's other paintings done after 1600, a perplexing circumstance if indeed it was substantially reworked in Barocci's studio, as scholars have generally believed. Moreover, a close examination of the painting by conservators, including the use of infrared reflectography, yielded little evidence of extensive repainting.[9] We think it is worth revisiting the early accounts that describe the circumstances of its repainting to consider possible explanations. The earliest and one of the most important is Giovanni Pietro Bellori's biography, written 60 years after the artist's death, based on information he received from Pompilio Bruni (1605–68), a maker of mathematical instruments who was the student of a pupil of Barocci's brother Simone. Bellori wrote that the picture's surface was damaged through irresponsible tracing. He noted that the painting was so popular that it was constantly copied and that one overzealous copyist had "practically destroyed it all."[10] The verb Bellori used to describe the copyist's action, "*lucidare*," has occasioned some discussion. Pillsbury translated it as "polish," whereas Turner used "trace" instead, suggesting that Bellori may have been referring to a common practice for tracing that involved using oil-saturated (and therefore translucent) paper held against the surface of the picture.[11] Problems with the oil or its improper application may have resulted in surface damage, or the copyist may have applied too much pressure in transferring the outlines of the figures to his paper. The damage had evidently already occurred by 1587, since notes from a confraternity meeting in that year reveal that the painting had been injured and that a proposal was made to limit

access to the altar, suggesting that overly attentive visitors may have also endangered the altarpiece.[12] The confraternity wrote Barocci in 1588, asking him to repaint the damaged picture, although he didn't agree to do so until 1606.[13] Further problems were documented in other confraternity records that describe the infestation of the church by mice, the re-backing of the painting to repair damage (presumably the mice had gnawed the canvas), and additional injury caused by their urination.[14] Thus, there is little doubt that the painting sustained some damage, as is confirmed by Barocci's own observation in his letter to the confraternity on June 2, 1607, when he noted, "I've seen the picture that they sent to me and to tell the truth, it was very poorly maintained and mistreated."[15]

The most conspicuous damage discernible today is the wear in the brocade pattern on Mary Magdalen's drapery. In a copy painted by Felice Pellegrini in 1593 (Figure 8.2), a pineapple design on Mary's robe is quite legible, although it is no longer decipherable in Barocci's altarpiece. The date on Pellegrini's picture indicates that this design was still intact in 1593 and therefore could not have been part of the damage that had appeared by 1587.[16]

The amount of actual harm that had occurred by 1587 is difficult to determine today. The 150-*scudi* fee, half of the 300 *scudi* he received for the original commission, has been interpreted as proof that Barocci did considerable work on the altarpiece. Given the high prices that Barocci negotiated for some of his late works (800 *scudi* for the *Last Supper*, 1590–99 and 1,483 for the *Institution of the Eucharist*, 1603–1607); however, 150 *scudi* no longer constituted a high fee, and one might plausibly conclude that the artist repainted only some portion of the altarpiece but not the entire surface. The absence of obviously repainted sections may initially seem to confirm this conclusion. On the other hand, one might expect some discontinuity of surface had the reworking been limited in scope; and the visual coherence of the picture conflicts with such a conclusion. Two explanations seem possible. One is that Barocci repainted a significant portion of the picture and was willing, in this special case, to rework much of the surface for comparatively little money. A second explanation is that he worked hard to disguise the areas of repaint, however limited they were.

Fifty years ago, Harald Olsen argued that the Senigallia altarpiece was substantially repainted in 1607–1608 by Barocci himself, based on what Olsen perceived as a close relationship between the *Entombment* and the *Institution of the Eucharist* (Figure 1.1), "especially in the treatment of light and color."[17] Seeing the picture in the London presentation of the exhibition where the *Institution* was also displayed, however, confirmed our sense that the *Entombment* has much more in common with Barocci's earlier paintings (for example, *Il Perdono*, 1571–76 and the *Rest on the Return from Egypt,* 1570–73) than with the altarpieces from the first decade of the seventeenth century. The luminous palette used in the *Entombment* does not recur in any pictures painted after the early 1590s. Furthermore, color concentrations in the late pictures are more localized, and unlike the early pictures, they display few sequences of three and four pastel tones within a confined area. The later works employ dark backgrounds and nocturnal settings, differentiating them even more from the *Entombment*. Therefore, although we agree with Olsen that only one hand is evident in the *Entombment,* that picture does not mesh with the artist's late style. If Barocci did substantially repaint a portion or even most of the Senigallia altarpiece, might there be another explanation as to why there is so little evidence of his later manner?

Figure 1.1 Institution of the Eucharist, 1603–1609, oil on canvas, 290 × 177 cm, Aldobrandini Chapel, Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome (Cat. 18).
Photo: Fondo Edifici di Culto, amministrato dal Ministero dell'Interno – Dipartimento per le Libertà civili e l'Immigrazione – Direzione Centrale per l'Amministrazione del Fondo Edifici di Culto.

Barocci's paintings during his late career were not of uniform quality. On the one hand, he continued to produce works of poetic grace and rich color, such as the *Institution of the Eucharist*. Yet, on the other, he made paintings that have been relegated to a second-class status, based on evidence of execution by studio assistants. An often-cited example is *Christ Appearing to the Virgin and to Mary Magdalen* (traditionally known as *Christ Taking Leave of his Mother,* Musée Condé, Chantilly, ca. 1604–12, Color Plate 29) that includes passages such as the hard contour of Mary Magdalen's face that are dissimilar to Barocci's characteristic style.[18] A more obvious case is the *Lamentation* (Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna, 1600–12, Figure 1.2), left unfinished at the artist's

death, in which major parts of the composition were executed by studio assistants. The kneeling Mary Magdalen, the woman attending the Virgin Mary, and Saint Michael all display heavily worked contours and physiognomies that recall the faces of the Madonna in workshop productions such as the *Madonna di Santa Lucia*.[19] Sensitive studies for the body of Christ, the pose of Saint Michael, and some of Christ's attendants testify to Barocci's involvement in the picture's design, but its uneven quality, discrepancies in scale, and unresolved composition make clear that he was not the sole executant on the painting.[20] The *Institution* and the *Lamentation* thus represent two ends of Barocci's spectrum during these last years, suggesting some considerable differences among his pictures in the amount and type of involvement by studio assistants.

Figure 1.2 *Lamentation,* 1600–12, oil on canvas, 410 × 288 cm, Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio, Bologna, inv. P 673 (Figure 21).
Photo: Collezioni Comunali d'Arte, Bologna, Italy.