Painting under pressure: Fame, Reputation and Demand in Renaissance Florence


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Abstract

This book considers the impact that economics had on Renaissance art. In late fifteenth-century Italy, there was increasing demand for goods of all types, including sustained demand for art which exerted significant pressure on sought-after painters. Analysing specific works, the book demonstrates the consequences of demand for decisions about production. It addresses questions of how master painters employed their workshops to fulfill the requirement for new works, and how, in the face of high demand, they produced works of quality. The book traces the careers of four artists whose work defined painting in late fifteenth-century Florence: Alessandro Botticelli, Domenico Ghirlandaio, Filippino Lippi and Pietro Perugino, men who turned out high volumes of work and attracted the patronage of prestigious patrons, and whose reputations for excellence were widely publicized. Economic questions have long fuelled research in art history and we know a significant amount about prices and business on a macro level. Less is known about decisions on the micro level: what approaches painters took to the manufacture of bodies of commissioned work, how they made daily decisions on design and pigments application, how serial production related to creating work for commissions. The book considers these issues within the framework of two arguments. The first asserts that levels of excellence in production reflected master painters’ choices; the second contends there was a central relationship among economics, design and quality. Using documentary evidence about price, scientific evidence about production, and formal analysis about appearance, the book demonstrates Renaissance business practices and shows the individual approaches artists took to producing excellence and meeting demand

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