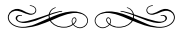


Looking at the Renaissance

Looking at the Renaissance



ESSAYS TOWARD A
CONTEXTUAL APPRECIATION

Charles R. Mack

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For my students, past and present:

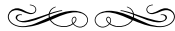
This is what I really meant to say.



For my granddaughter, Gabriele Nicole Daniels,

whose arrival brought me a Renaissance.

Acknowledgments



This book of interrelated essays is the product of more than three decades of active engagement with the artistic language of the Italian Renaissance. During the course of my involvement with this cultural era and the artworks coming out of it—as I introduced my survey classes to the beauty of Renaissance painting, sculpture, and architecture and investigated the accomplishments of the period at greater depth with my graduate students—I began to think more and more about how and why the Renaissance came to be and just what actually did determine its period style. Was there, in fact, some common cultural denominator at work that gave a particular character to the era? Was there some sweeping cultural gesture that typified what was, after all, the beginning of our modern age? Gradually, as my questions found answers that seemed to satisfy, my thoughts began to arrange themselves into some semblance of coherence. I finally have arrived at an overall vision of the Renaissance, and this book is the result. Although the pages in it are relatively few in number, the time it has taken to fill them has been long.

Some of my initial thoughts on the subject were first presented at the University of West Florida in 1981 as a public lecture honoring retiring art historian John Carey. Additional ideas were offered in a Columbus Year talk at the Columbia Museum of Art in 1992 and, in more refined form, a year later at my university as the inaugural lecture of my William Joseph Todd Professorship in the Italian Renaissance. Portions of what would become chapter 5, dealing with monastic frescoes, appeared in the 2001 issue of *Arris*, while some of the material in the section concerning Botti-

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

celli's *Venus* in chapter 4 was published in 2002 as an essay in *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*. The second chapter of this book also incorporates a version of an article on Brunelleschi's use of proportions in his design for the Hospital of Innocents that appeared in *Studies in Iconography* in 1979.

Despite these scattered public outings, it was always my intent and hope that my interpretation of the Renaissance would find eventual expression in book format. It was to that end that I devoted much of a sabbatical leave in fall 2000, with the completion of what could pass for a first draft being accomplished in the following spring. The maturation process certainly has been slow, delayed by several other projects along the way, by encounters with new and thought-provoking publications, and by my own unfolding and often changing perceptions.

Throughout the course of this evolving endeavor, I have profited from the knowledge and advice of many. Thrice, in teaching a graduate seminar on Renaissance methodologies, I have inflicted this manuscript (in varying stages of unreadiness) upon my students. Upon each occasion, I have benefited greatly from their comments and criticisms, made both publicly and privately. Several graduate students (Diann Montigue, Lisa Harris, and Alecia Harper) who have held my university's William Joseph Todd Graduate Research Assistantship in the Italian Renaissance have graciously read and critiqued versions of the text. Their recommendations as to content and presentation proved most helpful in making the final revisions. Ms. Harper's fortuitous background as a copy editor also was of considerable assistance as I prepared the manuscript for publication, and I am deeply grateful for her labors.

In addition to the assistance of my students, I have received useful advice from a number of others. Among the mentors to whom I am most indebted for helping to shape my attitudes concerning the Renaissance, I must record my especial appreciation to Professor John W. Dixon III and to the late Professors Clemens Sommer and Philipp Fehl. I have gained much from their perception and just as much through their example. The late Professors Ulrich Middeldorf and Howard Saalman also were liberal in sharing their considerable knowledge of the Florentine Renaissance. Among the colleagues at various institutions from whose advice and conversations I have benefited, several have been particularly generous: Charles Burroughs, Liana De Girolami Cheney, Bruce Cole, Andrew Ladis, Norman Land, William Levin, Henry Millon, Vernon Hyde Minor, Perri Lee Roberts, Barbara Watts, and Carroll (Bill) Westfall. Here, at the University of South Carolina, I especially am indebted to Jerry Hackett of the Department of Philosophy, who offered advice on

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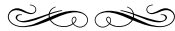
matters pertaining to his discipline. Susan Hogue guided me through a software problem, and I appreciate her expertise and patience. A thorough revision of the text was undertaken during the course of an informal fortieth reunion of members of the Berlin 513th INTC unit held in August 2003 near Charlottesville, Virginia, and I thank Dean Wilder for his hospitality on that occasion.

Once the proposal for this book reached the University of Michigan Press, I received encouragement and guidance from acquisitions editor Christopher Collins, editorial assistant Sarah Mann, and some most helpful and constructive criticism from two anonymous readers. The final version of my manuscript has been much improved by their intervention and assistance. John Benicewicz and Ryan Jensen at Art Resources facilitated the procurement of illustrations. Finally, throughout the long process of writing and revision, I have enjoyed the support of my wife, Ilona, to whom I always will remain in debt.

If I have failed to satisfy my readers, let them not abuse me, but rather consider that I had the temerity to tackle such a subject. If my talent has proven insufficient to complete what I attempted, credit should still be due me for having made the attempt. There is nothing that can be both initiated and made perfect simultaneously. Perhaps someone will come along to make right the errors I have committed.

*Paraphrased from book 3 of Leon Battista Alberti's
On Painting, completed and dated 17 July 1436.*

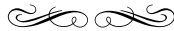
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