

Reviews

Silvia Masserano

Le prospettive architettoniche di Paolo Veronese. Analisi grafica e restituzione di alcuni teleri

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EUT

This book is the final development of a scientific research work that began some years ago when Silvia Masserano, author of this volume and involved in teaching activity at the University of Trieste, carried out her PhD Thesis, entitled *Prospettive architettoniche dei teleri di Paolo Caliari, detto il Veronese. Analisi, comparazione e restituzione*. The thesis was recently awarded with two prizes: the *Menzione Gaspare De Fiore 2017*, by the Unione Italiana per il Disegno, and the *Premio tesi di Dottorato EUT*, by Edizioni Università di Trieste. The last award has allowed her to publish this book with the funding and institutional support of her University.

This work contains the essence of all the previous research that she devoted to the analysis of perspective in the paintings of Paolo Caliari, better known as Paolo Veronese or, simply, 'il Veronese', which is, undoubtedly, one of the best exponents of Venetian painting of the Italian 'Cinquecento'. Veronese worked on the pictorial decoration of several buildings by Andrea Palladio, who refers to him in the second book of his treatise [Palladio 1570, p. 8] as "*Messer Paolo Veronese Pittore eccellentissimo*", as is pointed out by Alberto Sdegno, supervisor of the thesis and author of the preface of this volume.

The book is divided into three parts, the first of which is introductory, and includes the biography of Veronese and

an interesting analysis about the social and cultural environment surrounding the artist and the architectural influences that forged the character of his scenographic settings. Silvia Masserano explains how these influences were acquired from architects such as Michele Sanmicheli, Jacopo Sansovino and from the collaboration with Palladio himself. The essential support of his brother Benedetto and other disciples in the works of Paolo Veronese are also highlighted in this part, as well as the working methodology, which was used in the workshop of the artist. This section concludes with an interesting compilation of many preceding and contemporary treatises from which Veronese could have acquired his knowledge about applying the perspective rules to represent his pictorial scenes.

The main contents of the research are exposed after the introductory part and derive from the thorough study of the perspective in some of the artist's paintings. This work, without any doubt, is very unusual in its specificity, because analyzes in a very rigorous way, the use of perspective in the study of a work of art, and was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Italian Education, University and Research Ministry with the project titled *Architectural Perspectives, digital preservation, content access and analytics*, coordinated at national level by Riccardo Migliari of the Sapienza

Università di Roma (PRIN 2010). The results of this vast research project were published in two books [Valenti 2014, Valenti 2016].

In the second part, the author exposes an excellent study of the evolution of the methodology used by the artist in his perspectives, through the analysis of the vanishing points of the central projection in many of his works. Initially, Veronese followed with rigorously the rules of the genuine perspective as found in the treatises, for instance in his *Cena a casa di Simone*, painted in 1556, in which a single vanishing point is used. However, this method does not seem to satisfy the artist, since it caused excessive distortions in the objects represented on the upper side of the canvas. This issue was mainly due to the great height of the picture and the low position of the observer that forced the painter to establish the horizon line at the same level. For this reason, the author justifies the migration of the artist towards a much more flexible, multifocal, representative method that consisted in using several vanishing points, which were located on a single vertical axis, giving a more natural look to his large-scale works, such as *Nozze di Cana*, of 1563, or *Cena in casa di Simone*, painted around 1570.

The author also deals with some examples, which were painted on the ceilings in horizontal position. In Italian, these kinds of paintings were called "*prospettiva di sotto in su*", because they were seen by the observer from underneath and looking upwards. This different spatial relationship between the viewer and the painting led the artist to use another methodology, which, according to the author, was based on the mirror method, attributed to Giulio

Romano and described by Cristoforo Sorte. This methodology consisted in constructing an architectural scale model that was placed onto a mirror with a grid that helped to transfer the reflection of the model to a preparatory drawing. Although this method may seem like a mere natural drawing, Masserano argues that it is necessary to have scientific preparation and to know the basics of perspective in order to establish the proper point of observation from which the copy of the reflection is taken. The reason for this is that it has to proportionally match the real observation conditions of the final painting, when placed on the ceiling, to achieve a convincing illusory effect. The last part contains two case studies in which the author demonstrates her great knowledge of the inverse perspective; she carries on with the three-dimensional reconstruction of the architectural scenography represented in two important works of Veronese: *Il convito in casa di Levi*, painted in 1573, and a "*sotto in su*" perspective, placed on a ceiling of the Ducal Palace of Venice, known as *L'Apoteosi di Venezia*, which was executed in 1582.

The first case study represents a scene with a loggia and a staircase whose perspective contains different vanishing points, in consonance with the method used by the artist to avoid marginal distortions. This multifocal approach makes the restitution process more difficult, so the author begins to restore the digital model by studying the lower part of the lodge represented on the canvas. This projection can be considered a rigorous perspective, since those lines, which are orthogonal to the picture plane, converge in a unique vanishing point. This allows the author to restore the viewpoint of the perspective

and proceed with the reconstruction of the model plan, taking as a reference the true dimensions of a fragment of the represented pavement. The elevation of the model is constructed using the true proportions conserved on the frontal parts and confronting the represented classical architectural repertoire with the proportions described in the classical orders treatises.

So it is easily possible to understand the virtual reconstruction process, thanks to the expositive clarity and the profusion of elaborate analytical images describing the whole process, which is very rigorous and precise. The final result consists of a very detailed three-dimensional model that is represented in an elegant and realistic way, since the author does an additional analysis to restore the light direction of the original work and even the surrounding space in which the painting was originally located.

In the second case study, the author proceeds analogously to the restoration of the facade with Solomonic columns and a central arcade represented in the *Apoteosi di Venezia*. It is a monofocal perspective obtained by means of the mirror method, used by the author in his perspectives located on the ceilings, as previously mentioned. Masserano explains this methodology in an exemplary manner using a considerable number of figures. The result is a digital model very accurate and detailed.

The volume concludes with an interesting appendix, in which the author exposes an innovative dissemination methodology, using procedures of Augmented Reality, which is used for the interactive diffusion of the model of the loggia, developed in the first case study. This Augmented Reality model can be visualized through

any mobile device or a computer equipped with a webcam, from any viewpoint. This example is a very significant contribution to introduce the latest virtual musealization techniques for dissemination. The appendix also describes the methodology used for the com-

plex photographic acquisition of the paintings located on the ceiling of the Ducal Palace of Venice, which are taken using the latest techniques in automated photogrammetry, based on SfM (Structure from Motion), to obtain a high resolution orthophoto. So, for its rigorousness and its clarity,

the book could be suggested to anybody interested in the perspective applied to artworks. Its reading will not disappoint scholars of perspective and art history, who will surely be delighted with the contents and the flawless figures illustrating the volume, that is available in open access [1].

Pedro M. Cabezos-Bernal

Notes

[1] The link to download the book is: <<http://hdl.handle.net/10077/22465>> (accessed 2019, 10 May).

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