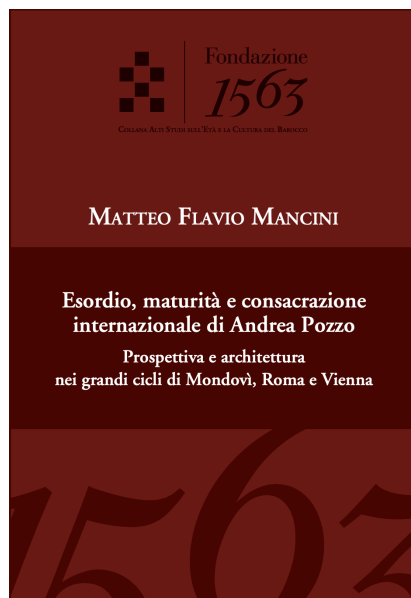


Reviews

Matteo Flavio Mancini

Esordio, maturità e consacrazione internazionale di Andrea Pozzo. Prospettiva e architettura nei grandi cicli di Mondovì, Roma e Vienna

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The volume by Matteo Flavio Mancini, entitled *Esordio, maturità e consacrazione internazionale di Andrea Pozzo. Prospettiva e architettura nei grandi cicli di Mondovì, Roma e Vienna*, investigates a pivotal theme within both the history of Baroque Art and Architecture, and the visual culture of the 17th and 18th centuries: the oeuvre of Andrea Pozzo, a master of *quadratura* and a theorist of perspective. Published in 2023 by the Fondazione 1563 per l'Arte e la Cultura della Compagnia di San Paolo in the *Alti Studi sull'Età e la Cultura del Barocco* series, the book concentrates on a comparative analysis of the three major pictorial cycles executed by Pozzo, correlating them with his treatise *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* (*First Part* and *Second Part* of the treatise date from 1693 and 1700 respectively). The overarching objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding of Pozzo's cultural trajectory, emphasizing his adept control and adaptability of methodologies within diverse construction site contexts and amongst heterogeneous workforces. Matteo Flavio Mancini's innovative approach lies in examining Pozzo's work not only from an art-historical perspective but also utilizing the methodologies of geometric analysis and digital modeling. This results in a new interpretation

that elucidates the complex interrelationships between real and illusory space, architecture and painting, theory and praxis, thus offering a more profound comprehension of Pozzo's genius. Furthermore, the extensive iconographic apparatus, encompassing color photography, reconstructive drawings, and three-dimensional models, facilitates an accessible and engaging reading experience, providing interpretation and reconstruction of the real and illusory space of the pictorial cycles under investigation and of the containing mural structures.

The book is structured into four principal chapters, preceded –respectively– by two prefaces contributed by Laura Farroni and Leonardo Baglioni.

The initial chapter delineates the cultural and theoretical background in which Andrea Pozzo's work developed, addressing themes such as the nexus between *architectura picta* and perspective, the symbiosis of art and science in perspective representation, the dialectic between monocentrism and polycentrism in architectural perspectives, and the role of image culture within the Jesuit Order society. Here, Mancini clearly reconstructs the fundamental milestones in the history of perspective, from Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) to Girard Desargues (1591-1661),

demonstrating how Pozzo positions himself within this lineage, inheriting the Renaissance tradition while simultaneously pioneering new avenues for Baroque illusionism. Mancini cogently highlights Andrea Pozzo's position within this panorama, inheriting the theoretical development and artistic experimentation of the 17th century, and anticipating the magniloquence of the 18th, bringing illusionistic virtuosity to its highest levels. The second chapter focuses on the perspective methods employed by Andrea Pozzo. Mancini analyzes in detail the two 'rules' expounded in the treatise, the 'common rule' (based on distance points) (*Part One* of Pozzo's treatise, 1693) and the 'easiest rule' (based on the intersection of plan and elevation) (*Part Two* of Pozzo's treatise, 1700), highlighting their specific characteristics and practical applications. Particularly interesting is the description of the 'perspectival grid' technique, used by Andrea Pozzo to transfer his designs onto vaulted surfaces. Here, Mancini illustrates how Pozzo adapts his method to different situations, considering the morphology of the surfaces to be decorated, the requirements of the commission, and the cultural context.

The core of the book is constituted by the third chapter, dedicated to the analysis of the three major pictorial cycles, described with philological rigor and excellent interpretive capacity: the works in Mondovì (San Francesco Saverio), Rome (Sant'Ignazio), and Vienna (Jesuitenkirche), reconstructing their history, describing their iconographic content, and analyzing their formal characteristics.

With surveying techniques and digital modeling, Mancini manages to restore the spatial and illusionistic complexity of these interventions, highlighting the perspectival solutions adopted by

Pozzo and his relationship with real architecture. The analysis of each cycle is structured into sections concerning the presentation of the work, the description of the perspectival methods used, and the reconstruction of real and illusory space.

In the Mondovì cycle, Mancini emphasizes the importance of the 'altar machine' as a unifying element of the space and as a tool to guide the viewer's gaze. In the Roman cycle, he highlights Pozzo's ability to create a perfect illusion, in which architecture and figures merge into a single vision. Finally, in the Viennese cycle, he emphasizes the monumentality of the intervention and its ability to radically transform the space of the church.

Describing the debut in the church of San Francesco Saverio in Mondovì, Mancini mentions how Pozzo wanted to "cover at least in part the defects" (p. 53) of the church's vault. In particular, he describes the architectural modifications made by Pozzo, including the widening of the windows and modifications to the geometry of the vaults. He subsequently describes the importance of the allegories of the four continents as "witnesses of the saint's mission" (p. 55). The fresco was first rendered three-dimensionally in outline to contact the work, its details, and the artistic gesture. This operation did not reveal the presence of grids for transfer, which, however, must have been used for the passage from sketch to fresco. Based on this evidence, it was decided to operate the reconstruction of the privileged point of view but not to propose a complete three-dimensional reconstruction of the work. Furthermore, regarding the *Apoteosi di San Francesco Saverio*, Mancini highlights how the octagon on which the work is painted is irregular and is grafted onto a system

of lunettes and pendentives with an uncertain geometric configuration and poor stereometric coherence (p. 61). Subsequently, in describing the Roman maturity in the church of Sant'Ignazio, Mancini cites how the false dome was admired and that "some people that were arriving to the door turned back again to contemplate it" (p. 74). The author describes the false dome as a solution to the problem of building a real dome and reports that the work received various criticisms regarding different issues, such as Pozzo's use of large-sized brushes, the overall dark tone of the work, the composition of the architectural party, and, again, the use of full-round columns placed on projecting corbels.

Analyzing the *Allegoria dell'opera missionaria dei Gesuiti*, Mancini describes the theme of the work using the words of Andrea Pozzo, as officially described in a 1694 letter addressed to Prince Anton Florian von Liechtenstein and, subsequently, in the second edition of *Part I* of his treatise published in 1702. The author further clarifies that "the glorification of the ecumenical mission carried out by the Jesuit order is therefore represented through the monumental distribution of figures in space who, from the allegories of the four continents, are redeemed thanks to the work of the Saints of the Society of Jesus" (p. 92).

The fourth chapter draws conclusions from the study, comparing the three cycles and identifying the elements of continuity and the specificities of each. Here, the author emphasizes how Andrea Pozzo managed to create an unmistakable style, characterized by a skillful use of perspective, a great illusionistic capacity, and a profound knowledge of architecture. Specifically, Mancini highlights how all of Andrea

Pozzo's interventions, in addition to the simple activity of decorating the environments, induce a significant expansion of the real space of each church. To fully understand this geometric expedient, Mancini studies in detail (and

places in the *Appendix* section) the numerous editions of Pozzo's *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* treatise, including a Chinese translation from 1735, the *Shixue*, which is significant for being the first case of systematic

exposition in Chinese of European perspective representation techniques. This testifies and confirms how the success of Andrea Pozzo's treatise lay in the numerous editions and translations that appeared over time.

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