



Radke, Gary M. Leonardo da Vinci and the Art of Sculpture

Filomena Calabrese

Volume 33, Number 4, Fall 2010

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1106444ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v33i4.15983>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Calabrese, F. (2010). Review of [Radke, Gary M. Leonardo da Vinci and the Art of Sculpture]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 33(4), 139–141. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v33i4.15983>

Radke, Gary M. *Leonardo da Vinci and the Art of Sculpture*, with contributions by Martin Kemp et al. Atlanta: High Museum of Art; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. Pp. 216. ISBN 978-0-300-15473-3 (hardcover) \$50.

Leonardo da Vinci and the Art of Sculpture is a catalogue published on the occasion of two exhibitions: *Leonardo da Vinci: Hand of the Genius* (2009), High Museum of Art, Atlanta, and *Leonardo da Vinci and the Art of Sculpture: Inspiration and Invention* (2010), Getty Museum, Los Angeles. It documents, explores, and interprets Leonardo da Vinci's relationship to the art of sculpture; it also includes copious illustrations of his sketches and notes, highlighting his engagement with sculpture and great Renaissance sculptural works that he was inspired by and in turn were inspired by him.

The catalogue opens with introductory remarks by Gary M. Radke, the curator of the above exhibition. Radke speaks about the validity and necessity of studying Leonardo's cognitive processes, told through his surviving manuscript drawings and notes, as an approach to illuminating his relationship to the art of sculpture. Current scholarship has already shown interest in exploring Leonardo's mind and so this catalogue complements this existing corpus of scholarly works with a close examination of Leonardo's less-frequently acknowledged role as a sculptor.

In all, the book contains seven written contributions by some of the most well-known and respected Leonardo scholars, such as Martin Kemp and Pietro C. Marani. Radke's more general work "Leonardo, Student of Sculpture" traces Leonardo's early years as a sculptor and places emphasis on the key role played by the Renaissance Florentine tradition upon Leonardo's development as a sculptor. Leonardo, in fact, apprenticed in the *bottega* of Andrea del Verrocchio, one of the Renaissance's greatest painters and sculptors, and was greatly influenced by his master's works (for example, *Beheading of the Baptist*) and methods, as well as by those of earlier sculptors such as Donatello, whose *Bearded Prophet* was on display in the exhibition.

In "What is Good about Sculpture?: Leonardo's *Paragone* Revisited" Martin Kemp discusses Leonardo as "a great plastic visualizer" (63) as is demonstrated through the artist's studies of three-dimensionality. Following this, Kemp revisits the *Paragone* text in which Leonardo declares sculpture an inferior form of art and attempts to identify what Leonardo believed was good

about sculpture. Pietro C. Marani's essay "Leonardo, *The Vitruvian Man*, and the *De statua* treatise" considers the influence of both ancient statuary aesthetics and contemporary proportion studies (those theorized upon in Leon Battista Alberti's *De statua*) in connection to the *Vitruvian Man* drawing and to a hypothetical sculpture treatise by Leonardo. The complex story of Leonardo's unrealized and unprecedented project for a bronze equestrian monument is retold in Andrea Bernardoni's "Leonardo and the Equestrian Monument for Francesco Sforza: The Story of an Unrealized Monumental Sculpture." In his thorough examination of Leonardo's preparatory notes and plans, Bernardoni reconstructs and narrates the process behind this larger-than-life project and even includes helpful images to illustrate the complexity involved in casting such a massive horse sculpture. Bernardoni's contribution is followed by Radke and Darin J. Stine's "An Abiding Obsession: Leonardo's Equestrian Projects, 1507–1519," which examines Leonardo's insistence to create a grand sculptural monument. Specifically, Radke and Stine describe the creative process and challenges involved in two other proposed horse projects: the Trivulzio monument and another one most likely for King Francis I. Both essays are compelling stories of Leonardo's persistence, hopes, and failures as a sculptor. Philippe S  n  chal's "Giovan Francesco Rustici, With or Without Leonardo" is devoted to one of Leonardo's close followers, Giovan Francesco Rustici. In his survey of Rustici's career, S  n  chal discusses the aesthetic affinities between Leonardo and Rustici and considers the essential aspects of Leonardo's work and practices that paved the way for the younger sculptor. *Preaching of the Baptist*, Rustici's bronze group sculpture at the Florentine Baptistery, is used by S  n  chal as the main example to stress parallels between the two artists. (The restoration of Rustici's bronze group inspired the exhibition curated by Radke.) S  n  chal suggests what Leonardo's sculptural output might have looked like had he completed any of his proposed projects. The book concludes with Tommaso Mozzi's "Florence and the Bronze Age: Leonardo and Casting, the War of Pisa, and the Dieci di Balia." Mozzi investigates Leonardo's relationship with war institutions, and then turns to the broader link between the arms industry and the production of bronze sculpture in Florence in the early fifteenth century, when Florence was engaged in war with Pisa.

The exercise of preparing an exhibition on Leonardo's sculpture presents certain challenges, especially since Leonardo did not produce a single sculptural work in his lifetime. The exhibition catalogue responds to that challenge by

offering a compelling and significant investigation of the “what ifs” suggested by Leonardo in his surviving manuscript pages associated with sculpture. *Leonardo da Vinci and the Art of Sculpture* draws our attention to an under-explored side of Leonardo’s talent as well as to the sculptors who inspired him and to those whom he, in turn, inspired.

FILOMENA CALABRESE, *Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies*

Secchi Tarugi, Luisa (dir.). *Il Concetto di libertà nel Rinascimento. Atti del XVIII Convegno Internazionale (Chianciano-Pienza, 17–20 luglio 2006). Firenze : Franco Cesati Editore, 2008. 760 p. ISBN 978-88-7667-351-1 (relié) 105 €*

Depuis maintenant plus de vingt ans, Madame Luisa Secchi Tarugi, présidente de l’Istituto Studi Umanistici Francesco Petrarca, poursuit l’organisation de colloques internationaux dont elle publie les actes avec régularité. Le colloque de juillet 2006 portait sur le concept de liberté : quarante-neuf contributions (en italien, sauf onze en français, deux en espagnol, une en anglais et une en allemand) abordent ce concept sous ses aspects philosophiques, politiques, religieux, littéraires et artistiques. L’ensemble offre un panorama remarquable sur une notion essentielle. Il est impossible de rendre compte en quelques lignes de chacune des communications. Il s’agira donc ici de mentionner les axes et les sujets principaux de ce volume qui s’achève par un très utile index des noms cités.

La première étude, de J.-L. Charlet, analyse *Libertas* dans la lexicographie humaniste (dont Perotti, Calepin, R. Estienne) et montre l’importance de son sens politique. Cette notion est liée à la notion de libre-arbitre, par exemple chez Zwingli (F. Buzzi) ou dans l’*Oratio de hominis dignitate* de Jean Pic de La Mirandole et dans la *Fabula de homine* de Jean-Louis Vivès (M. Lentzen), ou encore chez Lorenzo Valla (J.-C. Margolin). La position de ce dernier par rapport à celle de Boèce en ce qui concerne la liberté et la foi donne lieu à une étude intéressante de M. Laffranchi.

Fray Luis de León (1528–1591) est l’objet de deux articles : l’un sur son œuvre lyrique (V. Nardoni), l’autre sur la conception (influencée par celle de