

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Butterfield, Andrew, ed. Verrocchio: Sculptor and Painter of Renaissance Florence

Sally Hickson

Volume 43, Number 3, Summer 2020

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1075306ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i3.35324>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Hickson, S. (2020). Review of [Butterfield, Andrew, ed. Verrocchio: Sculptor and Painter of Renaissance Florence]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 43(3), 287–290. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i3.35324>

lay reading and devotion. Moments of weakness occur where Brown departs from her methodological commitment to specificity. In chapter 2, even if one grants the (debatable) premise that Catherine's approach to penance depends on Flete's, it is not clear that the ideas that Catherine is supposed to have inherited from Flete are particularly "English." In chapters 3 and 4, Brown sometimes slides confusingly between translations in a way that risks losing the distinctiveness and autonomy of the work of the different translators. In chapter 4, for instance, she blurs differences between Catherine's original and its English translation to make Catherine seem unproblematically the author of both texts. Brown also notes that the *Orcherd of Syon* introduced chapter divisions in order to help the reader, but Italian manuscripts of the *Dialogo* in both Italian and Latin also have divisions into chapters. Does the Latin version on which the *Orcherd* was based not have such chapters, or are the chapter divisions in the *Orcherd* different from the ones in the Latin original?

These issues aside, *Fruit of the Orchard* is a fascinating example of book history and establishes convincingly the importance of the reception of Catherine of Siena in later medieval and early modern England.

F. THOMAS LUONGO

Tulane University

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i3.35323>

**Butterfield, Andrew, ed.**

***Verrocchio: Sculptor and Painter of Renaissance Florence.***

Washington: National Gallery of Art / Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. Pp. x, 372 + 279 colour ill. ISBN 978-0-6911-8336-7 (hardcover) US\$60.

This beautifully produced and meticulously researched book finally brings the Florentine Renaissance goldsmith, painter, and sculptor Andrea Verrocchio the attention he so richly deserves. It respects the importance of his work by separating him from the legacy of Leonardo, inviting a reconsideration of his own considerable talents. Truly monumental in format and size, and filled with hundreds of crisp, detailed photographs that permit close looking in a way sometimes not possible in situ or even in a gallery, the sheer visual force of the book is matched by the excellent research essays.

Published to accompany the Verrocchio exhibition in Washington, the volume is edited by curator and Verrocchio expert Andrew Butterfield and contains essays by a host of experts: John K. Delaney, Charles Dempsey, Gretchen A. Hirschauer, Alison Luchs, Lorenza Melli, Dylan Smith, and Elizabeth Walmsley. Equal attention is given to painting and drawing as to sculpture in various media, and the essay by Hirschauer and Walmsley on collaboration in the workshop draws our attention to the fact that, while his work as a painter was highly praised by contemporaries, it remains difficult to understand today precisely because his paintings are workshop productions (69). Indeed, so many important painters passed through the workshop—Leonardo of course, Lorenzo di Credi, Perugino, Ghirlandaio, and others—that almost no paintings are now thought to be completely autograph. The most famous collaboration is found in the account of Leonardo's angel in the famous *Baptism of Christ* in the Uffizi, but Verrocchio's contributions are now thought to have been more extensive. The multi-media and many-authors approach makes sense given that Verrocchio's main competition in Florence was the workshop of the Pollaiuoli, who worked the same way and across the same variety of media. This habit of collaborative production, which we know also happened in Brueghel's workshop, would be a rewarding area for future study, shifting the focus from single authorship to a more nuanced examination of collaborative ways of making (84). New questions about artists are often as satisfactory as new answers.

Verrocchio has, of course, long been overshadowed by the fame of his student Leonardo da Vinci. Vasari's account of Verrocchio's abilities is much more prosaic and matter of fact than his enumeration of Leonardo gifts, but he makes three truly useful observations that help us understand Verrocchio's importance: first, Verrocchio was a restless, creative spirit who worked on many projects at the same time but was also an effective workshop master and teacher; second, he was a favourite of the Medici (Leonardo decidedly was not) and of Florentine patrons; and third, he was every bit as temperamental as Michelangelo, which made him a formidable personality. My favourite anecdote is Verrocchio's deliberate decapitation of his model of Colleoni's horse, his angry response to the Venetian city fathers when they considered asking another sculptor to fashion the figure of the rider. Verrocchio left town in a pique and the Venetians warned him not to return or they would cut off his head. Fine, he said, but while you would not be able to restore my head, I can

repair the head of the horse if you come to your senses. The *Colleoni*, which still stands in front of the church of San Zanipolo in Venice, is one of Verrocchio's most famous works (although he did not live to cast it himself). It is an essay in the art of the equestrian statue, one in which the power of the horse is perfectly matched by the powerful personality of Colleoni, and it offers a synoptic insight into Verrocchio's own strength of character.

Overall, Verrocchio's sculptural work models the formality of Donatello's classicism but incorporates a new fluidity informed by Botticelli. A work like his bronze *David* is both traditional and innovative, combining an engineer's sense of structure with a painter's sense of expression, a perfectly balanced form inspired by Donatello's earlier *David* but eliminating Donatello's formal and iconographic confusion. Verrocchio's *David* is more structurally confident, firmly adopting a broader stance while possessing an equally eloquent elegance of form. There are wonderful inclusions in the catalogue of works, especially various terracottas, like the *Angels* from the Louvre (Cat. 13) and the *Sketch Model for the Monument of Cardinal Niccolò Forteguerri* from the V&A (Cat. 12), that show the vibrancy of Verrocchio's relief work and his surface finish, the animation of line and mastery of materials that make his draperies seem to flutter and float. Series of photographs of familiar three-dimensional works from each point of view, like the marble *Lady with Flowers* in the Louvre (Cat. 8), help to conceptualize sculptural volume and reveal meticulous and beautiful details, like the curls of hair at the nape of the lady's neck.

We also learn from Vasari that Verrocchio's own favourite among his pupils was the painter Lorenzo di Credi, to whom he left his workshop. Credi was also an assimilator of styles, so much so that he was able to restore paintings by predecessors like Fra Angelico. He shared with Verrocchio the ability to run a large workshop devoted to multiple commissions, anchoring them firmly to specific, civic sensibilities and exigencies, talents never mastered by Leonardo who seemed restlessly doomed to wander, like Wordsworth, "lonely as a cloud." The subtitle of this book draws our attention to Verrocchio's essential Florentine-ness, his business acumen, professional equilibrium, and common sense (all qualities that stood in stark opposition to Leonardo). Luchs points out that there was no sculptor directly associated with Verrocchio's workshop to continue his sculptural legacy (68), but I would argue that Giovanni Francesco Rustici, a fellow Florentine briefly associated with the workshop, echoed Verrocchio's formal elegance as both a sculptor and a draftsman. Ranked by

Pomponius Guaricus in his *De Sculptura* of 1504, with Michelangelo and Sansovino, as one of the best marble sculptors in Tuscany, Rustici was eclipsed by both, but he is an important precursor to Giambologna, who is most often considered Verrocchio's most significant successor.

This is a book to be visited and savoured, bringing sculpture to life on the page, a sensual experience of the artist's work as well as an essential reference for Verrocchio studies. Just before the current Covid lockdowns started, I saw Verrocchio's *Incredulity of St. Thomas* (originally made for a niche at Orsanmichele in Florence) in the Louvre, at the beginning of the Leonardo exhibition. Its silent narrative on the tensions between the intangibles of faith and the haptic realities of proof is a monument to Verrocchio's metaphysical mastery of the sculptor's art.

SALLY HICKSON

University of Guelph

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v43i3.35324>

**Chevanelle-Couture, Aurélie.**

*Médée, mémoire du théâtre. Une poétique du mal (1556–1713).*

Travaux du Grand Siècle 50. Genève : Droz, 2019. 197 p. ISBN 978-2-600-05983-1 (broché) 48 CFH.

« Par la violence inouïe de ses actes, [Médée] demeure le point de repère à partir duquel se définit l'irreprésentable » (p. 161). À partir de cette hypothèse centrale, qu'elle illustre en s'appuyant sur un vaste corpus allant des réflexions sur le théâtre classique aux traités de démonologie du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, et jusqu'aux traités de cour du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, Aurélie Chevanelle-Couture propose une analyse passionnante des mutations profondes qui sous-tendent un siècle et demi de dramaturgie française. Le choix qu'elle fait de centrer sa réflexion autour de la figure de Médée s'appuie sur un constat, formulé d'entrée de jeu, qui l'amène à souligner l'importante production dramaturgique consacrée à cette magicienne régicide et infanticide entre 1556 – qui correspond à la date de la première impression de la *Médée* de Jean de La Péruse – et 1713, date à laquelle Pellegrin et Salomon ont créé leur opéra *Médée et Jason*, à une époque où ce thème ne jouissait déjà plus d'une emprise très forte sur le public français. Que