



Altarpieces and Their Viewers in the Churches of Rome from Caravaggio to Guido Reni

Pamela Jones, University of Massachusetts Boston, USA
Visual Culture in Early Modernity



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A social history of reception, this study focuses on sacred art and Catholicism in Rome during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The five altarpieces examined here were painted by artists who are admired today - Caravaggio, Guercino, and Guido Reni - and by the less renowned but once influential Tommaso Laureti and Andrea Comodi. By shifting attention from artistic intentionality to reception, Pamela Jones reintegrates these altarpieces into the urban fabric of early modern Rome, allowing us to see the five paintings anew through the eyes of their original audiences, both women and men, rich and poor, pious and impious.

Because Italian churchmen relied, after the Council of Trent, on public altarpieces more than any other type of contemporary painting in their attempts to reform and inspire Catholic society, it is on altarpieces that Pamela Jones centers her inquiry. Through detailed study of evidence in many genres - including not only painting, prints, and art criticism, but also cheap pamphlets, drama, sermons, devotional tracts, rules of religious orders, pilgrimages, rituals, diaries, and letters - Jones shows how various beholders made meaning of the altarpieces in their aesthetic, devotional, social, and charitable dimensions.

This study presents early modern Catholicism and its art in an entirely new light by addressing the responses of members of all social classes - not just elites - to art created for the public. It also provides a more accurate view of the range of religious ideas that circulated in early modern Rome by bringing to bear both officially sanctioned religious art and literature and unauthorized but widely disseminated cheap pamphlets and prints that were published without the mandatory religious permission. On this basis, Jones helps to illuminate further the insurmountable problems churchmen faced when attempting to channel the power of sacred art to elicit orthodox responses.

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Introduction; The triumph of chastity and justice in Christian Rome: Tommaso Laureti's Martyrdom of Saint Susanna (ca 1595-97) in the church of S. Susanna; The place of poverty in Seicento Rome: bare feet, humility, and the pilgrimage of life in Caravaggio's Madonna of Loreto (ca 1605-06) in the church of S. Agostino; Serving the poor sick with humility from the lazzaretto of Milan to the hospitals of Rome: Andrea Comodi's S. Carlo Borromeo Venerating the Holy Nail (ca 1621-22) in the church of S. Carlo ai Catinari; From sin to salvation: Guercino's Penitent Magdalene (ca 1622) for the church of S. Maria Maddalena delle Convertite al Corso and the fight against prostitution; Leading pilgrims to paradise: Guido Reni's Holy Trinity (1625-26) in the church of SS. Trinità dei Pellegrini e Convalescenti and the care of bodies and souls; Conclusion; Bibliography; Index.

About the Author

Pamela M. Jones is Professor of Art History at the University of Massachusetts Boston, USA. She is the author of *Federico Borromeo and the Ambrosiana* and a co-curator of the exhibition *Hope and Healing: Painting in Italy in a Time of Plague*.

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