

Alessandro del Meglio and Roberto Manescalchi, *Paolo Uccello: Un Affresco dimenticato?* Florence: Edizioni Grafica European Center of Fine Arts, 2006. 218 pp, [US \$18.95] ISBN 88-7612-005-X

Matteo Poggi and Leonardo Bucciardini, *San Niccolo del Ceppò: l'Enigma insoluto, Paolo Uccello – Beato Angelico e le confraternite fiorentine.* Florence: Presentazione di Alessandro Cecchi, Introduzione di Carl Brandon Strehlke, Caminito Editrice, 2006. 87 pp, Euro 14, ISSN 1971-8845

Alessandro del Meglio, supported by his colleague Roberto Manescalchi, proposes a new attribution for a Renaissance *Annunciation* in a stairwell, formerly belonging to the convent of the Santissima Annunziata in Florence. The mural painting, located in two lunettes in the stairwell in the west wing of the second cloister, has previously received little scholarly attention, although it has been described in a guide book as by an anonymous artist from the school of Leonardo (E. Casalini, *La Basilica Santuario della SS. Annunziata*, 1957, 110). The painting is in *terra verde*, is very well preserved, and is of high quality. Del Meglio and Manescalchi belong to the Istituto Geografico Militare, which is housed in an adjacent part of the ex-convent buildings. In 2005 they gained considerable attention when they claimed to have discovered a series of mural paintings created during Leonardo's stay at the Annunziata. Carmen C. Bambach, while sceptical of Leonardo's involvement with these paintings, has nevertheless pointed out the value of exploring the historical context of Leonardo's work at the Annunziata attested to by sixteenth-century sources ('In the Footsteps of Leonardo', *Apollo* 162, 521, (July 2005): 34-43). Now the authors argue for Paolo Uccello's paternity of the *Annunciation* on the basis of its *terra verde* medium — one for which he is renowned, a certain emphasis on perspective in the architectural setting, and perceived similarities to a number of Uccello's works, as well as other, less direct evidence. For example, they believe the stairwell was designed by Michelozzo, who spent time in Ghiberti's workshop, as did Donatello and Uccello. Since Donatello was Uccello's friend according to Vasari, the authors suggest Michelozzo and Uccello can also be described as friends. Further, similarities are found between the mural painting and Ulisse Forni's *Annunciation*, an unrealised design for a stained-glass window to replace the one by Uccello in the Cathedral of Florence that was destroyed in the nineteenth century.

All of this does not alter the fact that the mural painting does not bear a close resemblance to Uccello's style. The authors acknowledge the opinion of Carmel Bambach, who sees the drapery style as too elaborate for Uccello, and showing northern influences. Indeed, Uccello's drapery style is never so inspired by the angular expansiveness of

Netherlandish drapery as it is here, whereas Filippo Lippi, Botticelli, Leonardo and others did adopt this style to an extent. If not Uccello, then who? Here, a suggestion can be made. A certain Leonardesque flavour in Gabriel's drapery, alluded to in the old attribution, calls to mind the work of one of Leonardo's most ardent early admirers, Lorenzo di Credi, as does the distorted physiognomy of the Virgin's face, and the modesty of the architectural setting, echoing that of the Louvre *Annunciation*, which is increasingly attributed to Credi rather than Leonardo. Although mural paintings do not figure among the works attributed to Credi or his workshop in Gigetta Dalli Regoli's catalogue raisonné for the artist (*Lorenzo di Credi*, 1966), in 1524 Credi restored Uccello's *Equestrian Monument for Sir John Hawkwood*, which is painted in *terra verde* in the Cathedral of Florence. This indicates Credi had knowledge of the technique. Indeed, the painting of the *Equestrian Monument's* decorative frame is usually attributed to Credi on the grounds of its sixteenth-century style. As the most notable Renaissance exponent of *terra verde* painting, Uccello may have inspired, rather than been responsible for, the choice of that medium in the Annunziata. If the *Annunciation's* quality of execution is judged not quite the equal of Credi's, thanks to the macro-photograph reproductions in this publication (especially the detail on p. 56) it is clear the work was painted on the basis of a pounced cartoon, and so it is possible the painting was carried out by an assistant.

Manescalchi takes the opportunity presented by the publication of this booklet to reassess the state of current Uccello connoisseurship. He casts doubt on Uccello's authorship of the *Female Saint with Two Children* formerly in the Contini Collection, which was acquired by the Italian State a few years ago and is now housed in the Galleria degli Uffizi, the *Virgin and Child* in the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, the *Virgin and Child* in a private collection in Fiesole, and, with less conviction, the mural paintings in the Marcovaldi Chapel (or 'dell'Assunta' Chapel) in Prato's Cathedral. His approach is admittedly polemical, yet is oddly inconsistent. While he doubts these works on the basis of perceived lapses of quality and stylistic difference from Uccello's securely documented ones, he nevertheless accepts mediocre paintings such as the *Portraits of Five Men* in the Musée du Louvre and the *Expulsion from Paradise* in the Chiostro Verde of Santa Maria Novella, as well as the somewhat better *Portrait of a Young Man* in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Chambéry. However, the infrared photograph of the Chambéry portrait in the conservation file at the Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France appears to show bold, thick underdrawing unlike anything revealed so far by the infrared examinations of Uccello's works. Furthermore, Miklós Boskovits has shown that the young man's head is very close to one by Domenico Veneziano in the *Adoration of the Magi* (Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin) ('Da Masaccio a Piero del Pollaiuolo: Studi sul ritratto Fiorentino

quattrocentesco - I parte', *Arte Cristiana* 85, 781 (July–August 1997): 255–60 (260 and Figs 10–11) and so Veneziano is a better candidate for its painter than Uccello.

Also raising the prospect of a new attribution to Uccello are Matteo Poggi and Leonardo Bucciardini, who, like Del Meglio and Manescalchi, are relative new-comers to Renaissance art history. However, the former provide more thorough referencing and a more extensive bibliography in their small book than the latter. Furthermore, the authors present transcriptions of two unpublished inventories from the Confraternity of San Niccolò del Ceppo in Florence, which date from 1798 and 1810. Each refers to the *sagomato* (cut-out) *Crucifixion with Saints Nicholas and Francis* as by Uccello. The work still belongs to the confraternity, with the exception of the bust of Saint Francis now housed in the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In spite of the inventories, in 1909 Giuseppe Poggi attributed the work to Fra Angelico on stylistic grounds. While some art historians have agreed with his assessment, others have viewed the work as a collaboration between Angelico and his workshop because of its secondary quality, some have given it to his workshop alone, and others to a more distant follower. Poggi and Bucciardini do not reject the possibility of Angelico's involvement, so much as question it in light of the attribution in the inventories. In support of Uccello's involvement, they point out his membership in early 1438 of the associated Confraternity of Saint Jerome, which falls within the date range given to the *Crucifixion* in the literature: from the late 1420s to the 1440s.

Faced with the *Crucifixion's* evidently Angelicesque appearance, the authors hypothesise that the work may not originally have been 'cut-out', but a rectangular panel painting, of which Uccello painted only the background. In favour of this argument they cite the references to a frame in the inventories, together with an altar and a predella connected with the work. They also note the following: that it had been described in earlier inventories as a *tavola* — a term usually referring to a rectangular support; that the edges do not follow the painted forms entirely faithfully; and that a similar version of the composition by Pesellino in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, has a landscape background. It is clear, though, from the only other *sagomato* crucifix to be associated with Uccello — the one in the ex-church of San Jacopo in Campo Corbolini — that the cut-out format did not prohibit the addition of an elaborate frame (for a discussion of this work, see: Ludovica Sebgondi, *San Jacopo in Campo Corbolini a Firenze: Percorso storici dai templari all'Ordine di Malta all'era moderna*, Florence: Edifir Edizioni Firenze, 2005, 44–49; for an old photograph of this work in its seventeenth-century frame, see fig. 106). Thus, an alternative explanation could be that a tabernacle frame with a predella was a later addition to the confraternity's *sagomato Crucifixion*, supported by an altar. Furthermore, no mention was made of remnants of a landscape background around the figure of Saint Francis in the discussion of its recent

restoration, when overpainting was removed, even though there is a margin of panel support around the figure of the saint (Carl B. Strehlke, *Italian Paintings 1250–1450 in the John G. Johnson Collection and the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, Philadelphia: 2004, 52–54).

If there is no compelling evidence for Uccello's authorship of any part of the *Crucifixion*, or the *Annunciation*, these two booklets do draw attention to Uccello's enduring reputation from the sixteenth century, from which time his works were deemed worthy of restoration and imitation, until the nineteenth, when his name was attached to works that in all probability were not his.

Hugh Hudson

Honorary Research Fellow, Art History

School of Culture and Communication

The University of Melbourne