

Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



Gregory, Sharon and Sally Anne Hickson (eds.). *Inganno — The Art of Deception: Imitation, Reception, and Deceit in Early Modern Art*

Carolina Mangone

Volume 36, Number 3, Summer 2013

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1091038ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i3.20556>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Mangone, C. (2013). Review of [Gregory, Sharon and Sally Anne Hickson (eds.). *Inganno — The Art of Deception: Imitation, Reception, and Deceit in Early Modern Art*]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 36(3), 166–169. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v36i3.20556>

landscapes, one that may or may not include scenes from specific myths,” turning images into poems of seductive mental and visual appeal. Such a corpus constitutes the long-standing legacy of Italian art linking the classical past with the Renaissance present through impressive *all’antica* forms that even in our modern image-saturated world have the power to lure, fascinate, and intrigue viewers, as is demonstrated in Freedman’s volume.

GIANCARLA PERITI, *University of Toronto*

Gregory, Sharon and Sally Anne Hickson (eds.).

Inganno — *The Art of Deception: Imitation, Reception, and Deceit in Early Modern Art.*

Visual Culture in Early Modernity. Farnham, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012. Pp. xi, 204 + 21 ill. ISBN 978-1-4094-3149-7 (hardcover) \$104.95.

The true *inganno* (deception) of the copy is that it is never faithful to the original. This reality—the processes and implications of which form the crux of this volume—is what makes the copy a stimulating, consequential, and increasingly studied subject. Sharon Gregory and Sally Anne Hickson bring together ten essays (not all are discussed here) on European art and theory, from the fifteenth through the eighteenth century, that demonstrate how replication frequently reveals more of makers than their models and that consider how the new physical and temporal contexts—inhabited by the copy, and foreign to the original—significantly influence the latter’s reception. If the Renaissance placed unprecedented importance on the “original,” these essays make clear that this very impulse also drove the production of various copies, stimulated the rise of professional classes of art expert, and inspired countless deceptions: unintentional, deliberate, virtuous, scurrilous, material, technical, professional, and authorial. Although many categories of repetition are examined, the volume’s exclusive focus on imitation of another artist’s work or style neglects an essential type: self-copying. Individual contributions also vary in quality and significance. Yet the collective picture that emerges of an economy of copying—so intertwined with concepts of authenticity, originality, imitation, deception and replication that it defies strict classification—is essential.

Sharon Gregory's essay sheds light on Vasari's critique of Pontormo's adoption of Dürer's style in the 1520s, by contextualizing the biographer's censure within the broader discussion of artistic imitation and style formation in his *Vite*. Pontormo, in Vasari's view, had disregarded his innate style and thus suppressed—even deceived—himself. Gregory, however, highlights the constructed and moralizing nature of the biographer's text by demonstrating that Pontormo was inspired by prints after numerous northern artists other than Dürer, evidence that she suggests Vasari likely ignored in order to underscore the danger of obsessively imitating an exemplar with an incompatible style.

Allison Sherman considers the implications of an anecdote by Carlo Ridolfi, who wrote that in order to win the commission for the *Assumption* altarpiece at Santa Maria Assunta dei Crociferi, a project destined for Paolo Veronese, Tintoretto promised to paint in his rival's style. It was not the first time Tintoretto had altered his manner to suit market demand; this cunning strategy, as Sherman demonstrates, was disparaged by many contemporaries who believed trend-based production sullied painting's hard-earned nobility. Yet Sherman sees Tintoretto's versatility as both shrewd marketing and artistic virtue: an imitative tactic that challenged the popular hype for Veronese and vaunted his own art instead.

Cathleen Hoeniger's examination of painted copies after Raphael in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries posits various motives for replicating: novice and master artists alike copied to improve their skills and to learn Raphael's classical style; restorers copied to understand and absorb his technique; patrons commissioned replicas to substitute for originals; collectors, unable to acquire or afford the real thing, sought facsimiles; art institutions contracted or acquired copies as pedagogical tools and symbols of taste. Hoeniger argues that whatever their purpose, copies deceive unintentionally by registering the physical traces of the maker's hand and mind. Rather than transmit something about Raphael's art, replication transforms and camouflages it.

Lynn Catterson shows that the expertise of the early fifteenth-century Florentine sculptor extended beyond sculpting to include authenticating, restoring, counterfeiting, and consulting, making him the precursor of the professional dealer in the emerging antiquities market. Her analysis of four curious anecdotes about discovering antiquities in Lorenzo Ghiberti's *Commentarii* (c.1450), though too invested in assessing the veracity of each story, offers

examples of the connoisseurship practised by sculptors in the era before standards of authenticity were established.

Sally Anne Hickson traces the emergence of the professional antiquarian (a specialist in authenticating, valuing, and marketing antiquities) to the turn of the sixteenth century, as the overwhelming demand for genuine antiques fueled deceptive practices of making and selling. While discovering a fake like Michelangelo's *Sleeping Cupid* could make an artist's reputation and simultaneously destroy that of the unwitting collector, such *inganni* resulted in an increasingly sophisticated, if complicated, market. Hickson shows that faced with a dearth of genuine antiques, artists and antiquarians after the Sack of Rome expanded the definitions of authenticity and antiquity to include restoration, reproduction, modern-antique hybrids, pastiche fantasies, *all'antica* prints, and non-antique antiquities.

Hickson's second essay analyzes passages on painting and sculpture from Giuseppe Orologi's *Inganno* (1562), a little-studied dialogue on Venice's culture of duplicity, and shows how the *paragone* debate was mobilized to criticize endemic social artifice and expose the attendant risk of self-deception. Sculpture, for Orologi, mimicked the substance of the living (without the animating spirit); it was thus more deceptive than painting, which merely simulated the *appearance* of life. Hickson demonstrates that Orologi perceived the collector as the most deceived of all, for far from possessing art, he was possessed by it.

Steven Stowell takes seriously Leonardo da Vinci's claim that art is a universal idiom superior to writing because it imitates nature: "the work of God whose truths were fixed and constant." He argues that since Renaissance artists looked to unchanging nature rather than ever-changing language, they did not experience the same historical distance from the model that Thomas Greene's *Light in Troy* (1982) attributed to writers. Stowell proposes that artists recognized a spiritual purpose in representing nature and adopted metonymic or (Greene's) "sacramental" strategies to imitate nature as well as extant art or other artists whose source, in turn, was nature. (This view does not account for the contemporary, secular notion that the best art/artists had surpassed or perfected nature.) He suggests that true copies imitated the soul of the original maker as well as the physical form of the model. The ultimate goal of the imitator was sublimation to another artist, whether divine or mortal. This is a significant, if not entirely persuasive, reorientation of what art historians have learned from Greene (and others) who suggested that the Renaissance

prized transformative imitation that did not demand self-erasure. In some ways, Stowell's study is the exception that proves the rule proposed throughout *Inganno*: that is, that the copy is often the vehicle by which makers (intentionally or not) express themselves and flaunt conventional notions of authenticity.

CAROLINA MANGONE, *Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow, Columbia University*

Hillman, Richard.

French Origins of English Tragedy.

Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010. Pp. 111. ISBN 978-0-7190-8276-4 (hardcover) £50.

As Richard Hillman notes in the introduction to his *French Origins of English Tragedy*, French—not Italian—was the most widely practised vernacular foreign language in Shakespearean England. Hillman has done much to remind us of the literary consequences of this fact. *French Origins* is an invigorating study of the intertextual relationships between various French texts and a select collection of early modern English plays, including *Richard II*, *Sejanus*, *Othello*, and *Tamburlaine*. At fewer than 100 pages, excluding apparatus, it is an intensely compressed but nonetheless fascinating book.

It opens with a chapter summarizing method and content. The author's frequent references to material in his other works make this chapter a little erratic. Hillman explains that his approach contextualizes English tragedy in terms of printed French works so as to assess the "circulation and co-presence of diverse discourses within a common cultural space" with the goal of attempting to "activate hitherto unsuspected material resonances" in the English drama (2,4). While critics tend to insist on stereotypical distinctions between French and English literary cultures, Hillman argues, such distinctions are misleading. English tragedians, especially Shakespeare and Marlowe, found themselves composing out of a variety of contemporary French and ancient sources, and often reading those ancient sources "through and across" French intertexts or their English translations (11). Within the "common cultural space" of French and English literatures, it is the blend of the historical and political with the metaphysical that creates the conditions for the development of tragedy.