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Bohn, Babette. Women Artists, Their Patrons, and Their Publics in Early Modern Bologna

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Book Reviews / Comptes rendus

Bohn, Babette.

Women Artists, Their Patrons, and Their Publics in Early Modern Bologna.

University Park: Penn State University Press, 2021. Pp. xv, 316 + 144 ill., 8 tables, 4 charts. ISBN 978-0-271-08696-5 (hardcover) US\$74.95.

There is no doubt that Babette Bohn's much-anticipated book analyzing the place of creative women in early modern Bologna will change the way we understand and teach early modern art. Building on several decades of scholarship on Bolognese women artists, and women artists more broadly, as well as her own earlier publications on this and related topics, Bohn assembles the strongest evidence to date explaining why the city of Bologna was such a centre for these women. She does this by tracing "The Bolognese Phenomenon," a phrase first used by Germaine Greer in *The Obstacle Race* (1979), from the Poor Clare Caterina Vigri (1413–63) to the founding of the Accademia Clementina in the early eighteenth century. Although it has become somewhat of a trope to state that Bologna was a particularly hospitable site for women artists, Bohn's book compellingly and vividly explains why, exactly, that was the case.

The book begins with a succinct introduction that outlines Bologna's unique position. Legal and social practices, inheritance patterns, charitable institutions, and of course the presence of a university that was remarkably welcoming to women (at least in early modern terms) all played a role in elevating women in Bolognese society in general. At the core of Bohn's analysis are sixty-eight documented women artists from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, the vast majority painters but also sculptors, embroiderers, printmakers, and *disegnatrici* (women engaged in drawing for a variety of purposes). This is an astonishing number, much more than has been uncovered by any previous scholarship on Bologna or indeed on any other Italian city for the same period. Bohn also indicates, contrary to commonly held assumptions and practices in Italy and elsewhere in Europe, that many of Bologna's women artists were trained by men to whom they were not related, and that many received public, as opposed to strictly private, commissions.

Following this introduction, the book is divided into two sections. In the first, "Context, Biography, Evolution," Bohn examines the early biographies of Bolognese women artists—a genre of considerable interest, indicating

recognition of these artists as well as women in other prominent roles in the city—and traces their history to demonstrate the shift from what we might today call amateur to professional, culminating in the life and work of Elisabetta Sirani, whose unprecedented success helped propel later generations of women artists. The second section, “Patterns,” delves into the circumstances that allowed these women to thrive in Bologna, addressing issues surrounding patronage, the assertion of artistic identity through signed work and self-portraits, and the use of prints and drawings to promote and even extol women’s capacity to create.

Bohn balances close looking at objects—quite a few of which are not easily found in colour reproductions or indeed even black-and-white reproductions elsewhere—with close reading of archival documents and other primary source materials. She uses tables, charts, and appendices to harness her detailed research to great effect. It is impossible to deny her assertion that Bologna had, for example, more women artists than other cities when faced with a table providing statistics comparing Venice, Rome, Florence, and Bologna (table 1), or that Bolognese authors wrote more biographies of women artists than authors in other Italian cities when faced with another table comparing the work of sixteen authors (table 2), or that Elisabetta Sirani’s drawings were extraordinarily popular in both the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when faced with charts breaking down inventory information by century and artists (charts 3 and 4). While these tables and charts provide key information to support Bohn’s larger thesis, they should also be seen as a trove of information and potential models for those researching women artists in other places and times, too. The same is true for the three appendices. The first is a checklist of the sixty-eight artists, with biographical information as well as primary and secondary source citations and, in some cases, transcriptions of documents describing their work. Some of these artists, like the sculptor Properzia de’Rossi, are at least known to specialists, while others, like the miniaturist Rosa Tesi, are more obscure, but Bohn’s extensive work in archives and collections allows her to signal new chronological information and the existence of identifiable work when relevant. Although this appendix includes entries for both Lavinia Fontana and Elisabetta Sirani, the best known of these Bolognese artists and certainly the best documented and most prolific, the great many references to their work in inventories necessitated two additional appendices, demonstrating how very many of their paintings—as well as copies,

prints, and drawings, some identifiable, many not—appeared in Bolognese collections through the eighteenth century.

As a comprehensive and engaging examination of Bolognese women artists in the early modern era, this lavishly illustrated book will be used by scholars and students alike for many years to come.

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Cifarelli, Paola et Franco Giacone, édés.

La langue et les langages dans l'œuvre de François Rabelais.

Études rabelaisiennes, tome 59. Genève : Droz, 2020. 320 p. ISBN 978-2-600-06039-4 (relié) 58 CHF.

Fruit d'un colloque international organisé par Franco Giacone, Paola Cifarelli et Alessandro Vitale-Brovarone et tenu du 11 au 14 septembre 2015 à Turin – où Rabelais avait lui-même séjourné près de cinq siècles plus tôt –, ce volume regroupe dix-neuf études portant sur l'un ou l'autre des aspects de la langue et des langages chez Rabelais. Dans une introduction qui donne le ton à l'ensemble de l'ouvrage, Franco Giacone (13–17) compare minutieusement les commentaires successifs dont le syntagme « Les quatre bastions de Turin » (*QL*, LXIII) a fait l'objet. À la faveur d'une source documentaire récemment découverte, il rétablit l'attribution des travaux de fortification de la capitale piémontaise auxquels Rabelais fait allusion à l'architecte Stefano Colonna da Palestrina. Mireille Huchon (19–29) met ensuite en lumière le plus haut sens des interventions de Priapus dans le prologue du *Quart livre*, lesquelles ont été soigneusement travaillées par Rabelais. Ainsi, on constate qu'à travers la verve de ce personnage affleurent les réflexions de l'auteur sur les enjeux linguistiques et grammaticaux de l'époque. Longuement débattue, la signification de ce même prologue est revisitée par Heidi Marek (99–121), qui concentre son attention sur les traditions herméneutiques auxquels appartiennent les commentateurs d'Homère répertoriés par Rabelais et y décèle le penchant du Chinonais pour l'allégorèse diairétique au détriment de la méthode stoïcienne. Une analyse des liens analogiques entre la Sibylle de Panzoust (*TL*, XVII–XVIII), Raminagrobis