
*Rome 1600* advances Clare Robertson’s investigations into the closing decades of the sixteenth century, which formed the bedrock of the author’s seminal *The Invention of Annibale Carracci* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2008). Through in-depth historical, cultural, and stylistic commentaries, Robertson’s *Rome 1600* takes the reader on a journey inside the Roman circles and papal patronage, shedding light on the underexplored intricacies of late sixteenth-century Italian Renaissance Art. Robertson mingles factual and historical art information to fill the knowledge gap that to date art historians fail to examine with a deep attention. Pamela Jones, who objected to the state of research in the post-Tridentine decades, urged art historians in the introductory chapter of her monumental *Federico Borromeo and the Ambrosiana: Art Patronage and Reform in Seventeenth-Century Milan* (1993) to explore the interrelation of art and patronage as well as the new avenues for religious art that the Counter-Reformation artist was provided with when working for his ecclesiastical patrons. Taking Roman patronage as her focus, Robertson contributes significant historical data while concurrently setting her discussion in dialogue with several major studies of seventeenth-century Roman patrons, including Francis Haskell’s *Patrons and Painters* (1963), Sydney Freedberg’s *Circa 1600* (1983), and Jack Freiberg’s *The Lateran in 1600* (1995).

Robertson posits Pope Clement VIII, Rome’s most influential patron, as fully committed to Counter-Reformation goals and censorial measures (184); at the same time, Robertson cogently remarks that Clement VIII’s interest in the reform of images fizzled out decades after the Council of Trent laid down regulatory measures in its concluding session (1563). Robertson’s vigorous discussions of Roman artists and their patrons draw on the measure of relative freedom permitted to the artists as of the 1600s. Chapter 1 outlines Clement VIII’s policies and projects, with particular attention to Rome’s St. Peter’s and the Lateran Basilica. The second chapter focuses on the cardinal nephew, Pietro Aldobrandini, including relevant information about his cultural and aesthetic leanings as well as the idiosyncrasies of his
circles. Educated at the Oratory of Filippo Neri, Pietro Aldobrandini attended performances at the Chiesa Nuova in the company of Cardinals Federico Borromeo and Alessandro de’ Medici. In the same milieu Pietro Aldobrandini interacted with Roman patrons of art, establishing his commissioning agenda in the discussions he encouraged with the Oratorians and with Giovanni Battista Agucchi (105). The third chapter examines Roman palaces, villas, and gardens built during the period time. Chapter 4 is dedicated to the religious orders and their principal commissions in the major churches and chapels of Rome. The concluding chapter, “Lives of the Artists,” investigates the artistic interests and pedagogical methods of several painters, as well as the regional schools of art. As appendices, Robertson provides three documentaries concerning Pietro’s collection of copies of ancient sculpture and painting. That is followed by a discussion of Roman palaces under Clement VIII and instructions to the offices of Pietro’s household.

Studies of Borghese and Barberini patronages have overshadowed the contribution that Aldobrandini made by supporting lesser artists, such as Cavaliere d’Arpino, Giovanni and Cherubini Alberti, Domenico Passignano, Antonio Tempesta, Bernardo Castello, and other painters who, though much beneath the originality of Annibale Carracci and Caravaggio, remain nevertheless important. Robertson meaningfully highlights Pietro Aldobrandini’s commission of the Creation series and the Old Testament cycle from Cavaliere d’Arpino in the Villa Belvedere at Frascati, and quotes his description of d’Arpino’s Holofernes (118). The outstanding Sala de Apollo with Domenichino’s frescoes, also at Frascati, is carefully reviewed by Robertson.

Rome 1600 is a significant book, filled with beautiful illustrations and pertinent observations. Finally, Robertson provides experts with a dense referential text, even as she perhaps deliberately avoided up-to-date scholarly findings, instead choosing to include in her footnotes a large number of citations from Sebastian Schütze and Pamela Askew, whose studies have been drastically superseded since 1990 by novel and more complex literature.