

Art as devotion (New York, 27-29 Mar 14)

New York, Mar 27-29, 2014

Registration deadline: Jun 4, 2013

Arvi Wattel

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Artists “who work at religious and holy subjects should be religious and holy men,” Vasari stated in the *Life of Fra Angelico*, because “when such works are executed by persons of little faith who have little esteem for religion [...] they often arouse in men’s minds evil appetites and licentious desires”. Even though we should read Vasari’s comment as an intervention in the Counter-Reformation debate over the religious and aesthetic vocations of art, the question arises what there is to say about the devotion of Renaissance artists, its impact on their production and viewers’ responses to works of art as products of that devotion. Artists often enough offered discounts to religious institutions or donated work *pro deo* in an act of reciprocity, hoping to save their soul, but this panel will specifically focus on cases where artists created art as a spiritual exercise. Should we read Pietro da Lucca’s comparison of the spiritual practice of cogitatione, meditatione and contemplatione with the practice of painting (1514) merely as a metaphor? Could there be truth in Vasari’s statement that Fra Angelico “never painted a Crucifix without the tears streaming down his cheeks”? The sculptor Antico was well known for refusing to work on feast days, but other artists made it a special case to produce their work on those days. On the back of Lorenzo Lotto’s *Christ Crucified with the Symbols of the Passion* (Florence, Villa I Tatti, Berenson Collection) for example, a friend of the artist recorded that he had painted the work during Holy Week, finishing it on Good Friday at the hour of Christ’s Passion. Which artists considered the act of making part of a devotional process and why? What were its visual and material outcomes? And how did viewers respond to the works produced: were these considered more devout than others or even more ‘effective’?

Proposals do not have to be limited to Italian material.

Please submit a 150-word proposal, title, key words, and a brief CV to Arvi Wattel (arvi.wattel@uwa.edu.au) by June 4. Feel free to email with any questions.

Reference:

CONF: Art as devotion (New York, 27-29 Mar 14). In: ArtHist.net, May 16, 2013 (accessed Jun 9, 2026), <<https://arthist.net/archive/5367>>.