

Angela Dressen and Susanne Gramatzki

Editorial

Donatello Exhibitions Reconsidered

Because of his extraordinary talent and innovative capacities, Donato di Niccolò di Betto Bardi (1386-1466), better known as Donatello, has always been seen as one of the founders of Italian Renaissance art, with its cradle in Florence. However, despite his importance, he hardly received a monographic exhibition, apart from the 1887 exhibition in Florence. This is certainly due to his often large-scale work and logistical circumstances, as has often been claimed. Who-ever works on Renaissance art, and especially Renaissance sculpture, is therefore extremely grateful to the common effort undertaken by three Renaissance sculpture specialists, Francesco Caglioti, Peta Motture and Neville Rowley in their both joint and distinct efforts to create consecutive Donatello exhibitions in three places.



Fig. 1: Florence venue.

A considerable number of objects was able to move from one exhibition place to the next, while a good part was exclusively on show in one or two places. This had certainly an input on the thematically evolution of each exhibition, as well as on the selection of topics, which were either stronger or less dominant in each setting. Finally yet importantly, the exhibition spaces had a major impact on the topics, their distribution, but also on the reception of the topics and how they were perceived. Starting with Florence, Palazzo Strozzi (architecture around 1500) offered a Renaissance setting to the sculptures, giving the objects natural and pleasant surroundings with a contemporary touch. A series of small and typical rooms allowed for a narrow and close-look evolution of topics. Seeing the objects in natural light was particularly beneficent for both the study of objects and techniques. In Berlin, the giant rooms of the Gemäldegalerie had to be split up with paravants and walls, in order to hold topics in a context. But this allowed for more space and air around the objects, and easier movement for bigger groups. In London, the huge underground hall of the Victoria & Albert Museum would seem at first glance as a most unfortunate setting for Renaissance art, but the nice, delicate setting of stylized architectural parts in simple Renaissance styles, provided for a touch of Renaissance palaces, loggias and squares, an evolution of almost naturally displayed spaces, to which the topics were subordinated.



Fig. 2: Berlin venue.



Fig. 3: London venue.

We are very grateful to the three curators, to have accepted spontaneously the idea of a personal reconsideration of their own exhibition, providing more details of decisions and original situations, explanations of logistical circumstances, choices made and avoided, etc. The particular circumstance of such an important itinerant exhibition is worthwhile having a shared and personal reflection, which we thought would be useful to offer to the Renaissance scholarly community.

Venues:

Florence, Palazzo Strozzi, March 19 – July 31, 2022 (with an addition in the Bargello)

Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, September 2, 2022 – January 8, 2023

London, Victoria & Albert Museum, February 11 – June 11, 2023

Catalogs:

Donatello: il Rinascimento, ed. by Francesco Caglioti with Laura Cavazzini, Aldo Galli, Neville Rowley, Fondazione Palazzo Strozzi, Museo del Bargello, 2022

Donatello: Erfinder der Renaissance, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, ed. by Neville Rowley, with Francesco Caglioti, Laura Cavazzini, Aldo Galli, Berlin 2022

Donatello - sculpting the Renaissance, first published by V&A Publishing to accompany the exhibition "Donatello – sculpting the Renaissance", on view from 11 February to 11 June 2023 at the Victoria and Albert Museum, South Kensington, London, ed. by Peta Motture, London: V&A Publishing, 2023

Figures

Angela Dressen

Title

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