

Reviews

Agostino De Rosa (a cura di)
Roma anamorfica.
Prospettiva e illusionismo
in epoca barocca

Aracne editrice,
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The book *Roma anamorfica. Prospettiva e illusionismo in epoca barocca*, edited by Agostino De Rosa, has recently been published by Aracne. It contains eighteen essays by scholars of different disciplines on the subject of anamorphic projection, a sophisticated intellectual game that takes perspective to its ultimate consequences by applying the method literally in what we could call 'extreme' projective conditions. The book also has an extensive bibliography and short biographies about the authors.

Anamorphic projection is an important part of De Rosa's scientific production; he previously tackled the subject in his book entitled *La vertigine dello sguardo. Tre saggi sulla rappresentazione anamorfica* (authors Agostino De Rosa and Giuseppe D'Acunto, Cafoscarina, Venice 2002). In this current book he picks up the threads of that discourse and proposes an more in-depth review of several artefacts in Rome.

The book is one of the products of the PRIN 2010-2011 coordinated by Professor Riccardo Migliari and entitled *Prospettive Architettoniche: conservazione digitale, divulgazione e studio* [1]; its objective was to use current technologies and instruments to document, study and disseminate several examples of large scale wall perspectives and solid perspectives throughout Italy.

In his Introduction to the book Agostino De Rosa reminds us that perspective, especially architectural perspective, plays an import illusory role (the term 'to illu-

de' comes from the Latin *in + ludere*, to involve in a game), while anamorphosis appears to take this unique exchange between artifice and observer to new heights, where the spectator becomes in turn the creator since he is the one who establishes, thanks to the presence of the decorated environment, the occurrence of the illusion, i.e., a successful deception. In a game of cross-references, the latter is based on the exasperation of the rules of perspective, leading to a perspective theory taken to the limit, one in which the observer himself is included unless he assumes the position imposed by a constrained view that has exhausted all its margins of flexibility: "The *anamorphosis* is a warning written in the gentle language of art, which instead recalls a painful existential situation; it emerges as a corrosive perspective theory of what is pre-established, except when it reveals itself to be created by exaggerating the rules so abhorred and ridiculed" [p. IX]; in this sense, insofar as direct or catoptrical anamorphic projection is a reversal obtained by slavishly using the perspective tool, i.e. by not denying perspective and its theoretical structure, but rather finding its limits within perspective theory, it is a projection that emerged between the Renaissance and the Baroque. Its roots date to the fifteenth century, but it was perfected and disseminated more extensively in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through excellent pictorial and architectural works and the creation of solid perspectives



that deserve accurate, modern surveys and major, in-depth scientific studies.

So it's not surprising that the book focuses on a large number of Roman works, since Rome can be considered the engine behind the extremely interesting dissemination of Baroque architecture, paintings and decorations. The book reads almost like a guide to the precious, sophisticated artefacts of Rome, unknown to most; it provides detailed data regarding the location of the works and their accessibility, including addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses, and websites. The information conveyed in the book is useful for anyone who wishes to organise a visit; in fact the author is convinced that this subject can and should satisfy the interests of a much wider audience rather than a restricted number of professionals.

De Rosa is well aware that the current situation regarding anamorphic projective technique, currently revived in media and digital systems [p. IX], is destined to become part of a communication that will reach the spectator anywhere, whether it be for enjoyment, information or even as publicity, i.e., when the recipient of the message does not choose to be encumbered by the illusion, but the illusion itself reaches him in contexts where he is an easy 'prey' (e.g., in the 'three-dimensional' ads that appear along the sides of a football field, or in many television stage sets).

Notes

[1] The PRIN was participated by several Research Units: Sapienza Università di Roma (coordinator Prof. Riccardo Migliari, national scientific coordinator of the PRIN), Politecnico di Torino (coordinator Prof. Anna Marotta), Politecnico di

The book provides extensive information about the monastic complex of Trinità dei Monti: authors include Alesio Bortot (who studied the meridian in Convent), Francesco Bergamo and Antonio Calandriello (*trompe l'oeil* paintings in the refectory), Massimiliano Ciammichella (Architectural Perspectives in the monastery's pharmacy), Giuseppe D'Acunto and Gabriella Liva (library), Agostino De Rosa (anamorphosis of St. John the Evangelist by Jean François Niceron), and Gabriella Liva (anamorphosis of the portrait of St. Francis of Paola by Father Emmanuel Maignan).

In Palazzo Barberini the studies focus on the catoptrical anamorphoses by Niceron (Isabella Friso) and the accelerated perspectives in Borromini's windows (Giulia Piccinin).

As regards Palazzo Capodiferro, Cristina Cándito concentrates on the colonnade and the clock, Cosimo Monteleone focuses on the catoptrical meridians by Emmanuel Maignon, and Leonardo Paris examines the famous solid perspective of Borromini's gallery.

In the Jesuit complex in Rome the studies concentrated on the perspective *trompe l'oeil* and illusory images on the vault of the Church of the Holy Name of Jesus by Giovan Battista Gaulli (Giuseppe D'Acunto and Stefano Zoerle) and the corridor painted by Father Andrea Pozzo in the adjacent Casa Professa of the Jesuit Order (Jessica Romor). The decoration

with the Glory of St. Ignatius (Matteo Flavio Mancini) and the fake dome on canvas (Leonardo Baglioni, Marta Salvatore), again by Andrea Pozzo, are the images studied in the church of St. Ignatius de Loyola

The decorations and architectural context of all these examples were first surveyed using contemporary instruments. The study then focused on their geometric-illusionistic plans and projective structures in order to reveal the illusory design and how it functioned emotionally. Where necessary three-dimensional models were made either of the real space around the artefact or the implied illusory space, suitably recreated and connected thanks to the presence of the observer. In fact an anamorphosis "works" if the projective rules are known by both the author and user of the space, a space which, if freely exploited, can simultaneously either be enlarged or transformed by the perspective work, or reveal the mechanisms of the illusionistic diversion and thereby trigger immediate disenchantment. Perspective is at its greatest in *trompe l'oeil* images; it becomes a dangerous but extremely effective game, beyond which the method no longer appears to be in a phase of enlargement and transformation of its projective algorithms, but sediments its applications in theatrical art and stage settings.

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