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Jacobus, Laura (2015) Book review: 'Lippo di Dalmasio: 'assai valente pittore' by Flavio Boggi and Robert Gibbs (Bologna: Bononia University, 2013). *Renaissance Quarterly* 68 (4), pp. 1355-1357. ISSN 0034-4338.

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Lippo di Dalmasio, it is fair to say, is not a well-known painter. Active c.1370-1410, he exists on the periphery of art historians' vision as a Bolognese artist who also worked in Pistoia. The authors have rescued him from the obscurity in which he normally languishes and have produced the first monograph and *catalogue raisonnée* of his work. They did so first in English in *The Life and Career of Lippo di Dalmasio* (2010), and now in Italian, in a publication as beautifully-produced as the English version was not. Now their main text can be read in conjunction with excellent colour images, supplemented by black-and-white illustrations in the catalogue section of the book. This clarity and attractiveness has been gained at the cost of relegating references to the ends of each chapter. In such a dense text (sometimes as many as three endnotes to a sentence) this may be frustrating to scholars wishing to engage with historiographic minutiae, but it is a kindness to readers who wish primarily to discover Lippo's work and perhaps test the authors' attributions against the visual evidence. In other respects, the Italian version of the book is a straightforward translation of the English, with only minor updates.

Lippo's critical fortunes reached their zenith in the seventeenth-century, which deemed him the 'highly talented painter' of this volume's title, but by the dawn of modern art history he stood condemned as repetitive and derivative. The authors make some effort to assert Lippo's artistic worth in the face of such criticisms, helped by their illustrations of some genuinely fine works. The London *Madonna of Humility* could probably bear more praise than they bestow upon it. Even in its heavily-restored state it is not only a work of great sweetness and charm, but a remarkably assured design. His atmospheric *Madonna del Velluto* is also a delight. The authors make an ingenious attempt to put a positive spin on the very repetitiveness that condemned Lippo and his endless *madonnas* in the past; they suggest that in the highly legalistic culture of Bologna, standardised imagery was regarded as desirable. It would have been interesting to explore related possibilities, such as the economic factors which might lead an artist to specialise in such a limited range of subjects and treatments.

For much of the book, the authors are happy to accept Lippo's perceived limitations as a given, preferring to concentrate on reconstructing his career and oeuvre. The former task is bolstered by considerable documentation (an astonishing 128 documentary extracts are supplied), from which a portrait of Lippo as an active citizen emerges. A portrait of the artist as a young man is harder to define. The Bolognese works of c.1390-1410 are mostly signed, and it might seem easy to work backwards from these, using stylistic analysis to identify early works in Pistoia. It is not, because the Pistoian and Bolognese works are often so different as to appear to be by different painters. The Pistoia *Madonnas* are slightly-built fair maidens with elongated features, struggling with chubby and overactive babies. They are obviously indebted to Sieneese painters of an earlier generation. The Bologna *Madonnas* are darker exotics, plumper and better-equipped to handle their still-wriggling offspring. Faced with this stylistic conundrum, the authors seek traces of Bolognese influence in the Pistoian paintings of c.1370-90, especially stylistic elements which recall Lippo di Dalmasio's father and uncle, both Bolognese painters. But no certain works by Dalmasio exist, and other North Italian painters were working in Pistoia at the same time as Lippo. A single Bolognese fresco signed by Lippo (now in a private collection) does seem stylistically related to the Pistoian group, supplying a missing link between the two periods of the artist's life, but doubts about some of the proposed attributions will inevitably persist. Once again, it would be interesting to ponder whether there were economic incentives for this apparently conservative artist to change his style so radically when he moved from Pistoia back to his native Bologna. Such questions can be asked only because

of the authors' exceptional efforts to bring Lippo di Dalmasio to notice, and it is to be hoped that this beautifully-illustrated volume will now achieve that end.

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