



Histories of Violence:

Italy and the Mediterranean c.1300-1700

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Research Forum South Room, The Courtauld Institute of Art

ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

Tom Nickson (Courtauld Institute of Art)
Ritual and Violence in Toledo c.1400

This paper examines the role of violent representations in a multi-confessional community at a time of intense social conflict. It considers first of all how traditional and familiar images might be vulnerable to different readings subject to their topographical position and the communities they address. It then focuses on the production of violent images in Toledo in the years following the explosive anti-Jewish pogroms of 1391, and proposes that real acts of violence might be preserved by a ritual and visual memory that accommodates them into an ordered process of conversion. Violence is not perceived merely as a negative symbol of disorder but as a necessary stage in the conversion of Jews to Christians – a kind of baptism of blood.

Tom Nickson did his MA with Professor Paul Crossley at The Courtauld Institute of Art. He is now completing his PhD, a monograph on Toledo cathedral, its construction and decoration in the social and cultural context of medieval Castile.

Anthea Stevens (Courtauld Institute of Art)
The Good, the Bad and the Defaced – the Representation of the Holy Innocents in Italian Liturgical Manuscripts between 1300 and 1500

When discussing the visual culture of violence in the late Middle Ages, Valentin Groebner expresses the view that the representation of extreme violence makes its victims anonymous, it renders them *ungestalt* = formless, defaced. In this paper Stevens will examine Groebner's view in relation to scenes of the *Massacre of the Innocents*, which over the centuries have depicted the killing of young children with blood-thirsty realism.

The relationship between violence and identity will be explored, with particular reference to the depiction of the Holy Innocents within liturgical manuscripts produced in Italy between 1300 and 1500.

Anthea Stevens is currently working on her PhD at The Courtauld Institute of Art, under the supervision of Dr Joanna Cannon. The title of her thesis is 'The

representation of the Holy Innocents in Italian art between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries'. Previously, she had studied at The Courtauld, gaining the Postgraduate Diploma and the MA in the History of Art in 2002 and 2003 respectively.

Per Rumberg (Courtauld Institute of Art)

Seeing is Believing: The Anatomy Scene in the 'Fasciculo di Medicina'

This paper concerns the anatomy scene in the 1494 edition of the so-called *Fasciculo di Medicina*, a medical treatise published in Venice by the brothers Giovanni and Gregorio de' Gregori. The overall composition of the woodcut can be traced back to earlier representations of medical scenes as well as to religious images, such as Donatello's *Miracle of the Avaricious Man's Heart* or Giotto's *Funeral of Saint Francis*. Unlike any other depiction of a post-mortem examination, however, the *Fasciculo* woodcut shows the moment *before* the abdomen is actually opened. The attention of the viewer is thus directed to the figure of the dissector who, the knife poised over the exposed body, seems to be confronted with a moral dilemma (similar, as it were, to that of Abraham about to sacrifice his son). Whereas the dissector's hesitation intriguingly underscores the aspect of violence involved in dissecting a human body, the relation between the professor and the demonstrator suggests that the scene may also be read as a manifestation of the tension between theoretical and practical knowledge at the threshold of modern science.

Per Rumberg studied art history at the Humboldt University in Berlin and The Courtauld Institute of Art. His MA dissertation – entitled “La groppa verso il popolo’: Pisanello and the Motif of the Horse Seen from Behind” – was awarded the Courtauld Dissertation Prize 2007. He is now working on his PhD with Professor Patricia Rubin on depictions of Doubting Thomas and the notion of visual experience in Renaissance Italy.

Samuel Bibby (University College London)

'Più simiglianza di torneamenti e di giuochi militari, che di vere e giuste battaglie': Uccello's Battle of San Romano Panels and the Spaces of Ritual in Renaissance Florence

Paolo Uccello's *Battle of San Romano* panels have long been considered as amongst the greatest depictions of war in the Western art-historical canon. As one sixteenth-century commentator noted, however, none of the contemporary chroniclers of the actual battle of 1432 mentioned the fact that there had been any bloodshed. The recent archival discoveries revealing the panels' patron and original owner to have been Lionardo Bartolini Salimbeni, rather than the Medici as hitherto assumed, will be exploited to present a new set of motivations for their commission, and meanings for what they depict. Analysing the panels alongside the other objects recorded in their original setting, Lionardo's *camera grande*, Bibby will employ the contemporary discourses of space and place in order to formulate a reading of them that puts emphasis on the public ritual practice of Renaissance Florence. He argues that rather than depicting the reality of a fifteenth-century battlefield these panels evoke the street- and piazza-based culture of civic processions and festivities within which their original patron and his intended audience would have been involved both politically and socially. Uccello's use of linear perspective, for which these panels are often noted,

provided an innovative way to create a spatial relationship between the picture field, the room in which the panels were installed, and the city beyond its walls. The result was that the violence of the battle between Florence and Siena ultimately came to be cast in Uccello's panels through rituals with more resemblance to tournaments and military games than bloody conflict.

Samuel Bibby gained a BA in Italian from the University of Exeter and an MA from The Courtauld Institute of Art. He is currently completing a PhD at University College London which examines the relationship between space and ritual in art and architecture from fifteenth- and early-sixteenth-century Florence.

Scott Nethersole (Courtauld Institute of Art)
Violence and Invention in Late Fifteenth-Century Florence

This paper examines three Florentine works on violent themes: Bertoldo di Giovanni's bronze *Battle Relief*, Antonio del Pollaiuolo's *Battle of the Nudes* and Michelangelo's *Battle of the Centaurs*. All three take their visual inspiration, but not necessarily their subjects, from antique relief sculpture. Indeed, the iconography of Bertoldo and Antonio's works has never been adequately explained. Using Michelangelo's marble as a key to the associations of violence *all'antica*, it will be argued that the real 'subject' of these works is bound up in notions of *invenzione*. Violence – it will be suggested – could encode artistic self-inscription.

Scott Nethersole is currently completing his PhD research on the subject of 'The Representation of Violence in Florence during the Fifteenth Century'.

Edward Payne (Courtauld Institute of Art)
Drawn to Torture, Called to Witness: Ribera's 'Inquisition Scene'

The numerous drawings of torture by the Spanish artist Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652) have sparked much debate from specialists in the field of Seicento studies. Most noteworthy are the artist's intriguing portrayals of the bound male figure – often tied to a tree – representing subjects that derive from religion, mythology and contemporary society. Scholars' interpretations of these works range from suggesting Ribera's personal obsessions to defending his particular aesthetic interests. This paper challenges such readings by taking as its focus the striking sketch of *An Inquisition Scene*, now located in the Providence Museum of Art. The drawing depicts a form of torture known as the *strappado*, which involved suspending the body in mid-air by the hands. This method was commonly employed by both the Inquisition and the secular courts in order to extract confessions from accused criminals. After situating Ribera's drawing within a wider context of torture documentation and inquisitorial practices, this paper will then examine the work in light of contemporary depictions of the *strappado*, considering both the power of instilling fear and the problems of witnessing violence.

Edward Payne completed his BA in French Studies at the University of London Institute in Paris in 2004, and his MA at The Courtauld Institute of Art in 2005. He is currently writing his PhD thesis, with the working title 'Violence and Corporality in the Art of Jusepe de Ribera', under the supervision of Dr Sheila McTighe.

Sara Gonzalez (Institute of Musical Research)

Marsyas Flayed Alive: Wind Music and Pride in Early Modern Western Art

The flaying of the satyr Marsyas by the God Apollo is a popular mythology subject in the art and literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It constitutes a striking scene of physical violence, comparable to contemporary representations of Christian martyrdom. In Ancient Greece, this fable related to the superiority of string over wind instruments: lyres and zithers were education instruments, while flutes and reeds lacked the same consideration because they did not allow the use of the word while being played.

Marsyas' punishment was the consequence of the satyr's reckless behaviour, as he dared to challenge Apollo in a musical contest, saying that the melody of his *aulos* was superior to the sound of the God's lyre. Since the terms of the competition stated that the winner could treat the defeated party any way he wanted, the loser Marsyas was tied to a tree and flayed alive.

In her paper Gonzalez will analyze the political uses of this story of violence, which had important symbolic connotations in the period of the absolute monarchies. It has been considered the most successful mythology scene in seventeenth-century Spanish history painting, as represented by Velázquez, Ribera and Mazo. It also appears in emblem books, like *Emblemas morales*, Horozco y Covarrubias (Segovia 1589), symbolizing the high price of the imprudent behaviour of those who dare to compete with their superiors. This paper also provides an insight into the iconography of music of Western culture, as the political documents and artworks of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries identify the ruler with the seven-string lyre, while the rupture of social harmony through flattery or pride is associated with wind musical instruments.

Sara Gonzalez received her PhD in the History of Art from the Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Toledo in 2005. She has a strong interest in representations of music in art, in particular the musical iconography of power in the early modern period. Sara is currently a research fellow at the Institute of Musical Research; this has allowed her to complete a book proposal, 'The Musical Iconography of Power in Seventeenth-Century Spain', under consideration by Pickering & Chatto Publishers. She is also an honorary fellow at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology of Birkbeck College. Sara is currently working on two postdoctoral research projects: the fragmented object as an artistic subject and the reinterpretation of Greek and Roman mythology in the arts of colonial Latin America.