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978-1-107-02304-8 - Votive Panels and Popular Piety in Early Modern Italy

Fredrika H. Jacobs

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VOTIVE PANELS AND POPULAR PIETY IN EARLY MODERN ITALY

In the late fifteenth century, votive panel paintings, or *tavolette votive*, began to accumulate around reliquary shrines and miracle-working images throughout Italy. Although often dismissed as popular art of little aesthetic consequence, more than fifteen hundred panels from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are extant, a testimony to their ubiquity and importance in religious practice. Humble in both their materiality and style, they represent donors in prayer and supplicants petitioning a saint at a dramatic moment of crisis. In this book, Fredrika H. Jacobs traces the origins and development of the use of votive panels in this period. She examines the form, context, and functional value of votive panels and considers how they created meaning for the person who dedicated them as well as how they accrued meaning in relationship to other images and objects within a sacred space activated by practices of cultic culture.

Fredrika H. Jacobs is professor emerita of art history, Virginia Commonwealth University. She is the author of *Defining the Renaissance "Virtuosa": Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism* (Cambridge University Press, 1997) and *The Living Image in Renaissance Art* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). She has contributed essays to a variety of books dealing with gender, aesthetics, and popular culture in the Renaissance. Her work has appeared in numerous scholarly journals and anthologies, including *Renaissance Quarterly*, the *Art Bulletin*, and *Word & Image*.

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Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond



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For Paul, Jessica, Nick, & Peter

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When we concentrate on a material object, whatever its situation,
the very act of attention may lead to our involuntarily sinking into
the history of that object.

Vladimir Nabokov, *Transparent Things*, 1972

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The origin of this study lies in my further reflection upon a category of lifelike-ness, or living images, not adequately discussed in my previous book, namely animate sacred images. Here the principal focus is not representations of the Madonna that reportedly cried, bled, bruised, shifted position, or otherwise displayed signs of life but rather *ex-votos*, specifically small painted panels visualizing an act of intercession at a moment of personal crisis or commemorating a miraculous cure or rescue. In researching these amazing paintings, I have received support, encouragement, and guidance from individuals and institutions. The Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., generously supported this project both at its beginning and near its end. Villa I Tatti, the Harvard Center for Italian Renaissance Studies in Florence, did so midway through. The richness of resources available at both of these institutions – in particular, the insights and assistance offered by the community of scholars at each – is remarkable, a true gift. I am grateful to Elizabeth Cropper and Joseph Connors for affording me the privilege of membership. I also thank Richard Toscan, Dean Emeritus of the School of the Arts, Virginia Commonwealth University, who supported my research in many ways. Heartfelt thanks for walking me through collections, assisting me with translations, sharing images of *tavolette* from sites I missed, and engaging me in stimulating and challenging discussions is due also to Lorenzo Pericolo, Giancarla Periti, Ann Mullavey, Anna Kim, Catherine Kovesi, Steven Ostrow, Sara Matthews-Grieco, John O'Malley, Loris Pasini, Giancarlo Turrotti, Angela Federico, Simona Tozzo, Klaus Pietschmann, Gianfranco Ciprini, Francesco Ciprini, Ittai Weinryb, others named in footnotes, and still others too numerous to mention. Above all, I thank Megan Holmes, whose knowledge of cultic culture is extensive and generosity unbounded. Gratitude is also and as always extended to Beatrice Rehl for her enduring encouragement. Finally and crucially, I thank my wonderful family: Paul, Nick, Peter, and most importantly Jessica, a scholar and a *miracolata*.

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