

COLLECTING ART IN THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE COURT

In this book, Leah R. Clark examines collecting practices across the Italian Renaissance courts, exploring the circulation, exchange, collection, and display of objects. Rather than focusing on patronage strategies or the political power of individual collectors, she uses the objects themselves to elucidate the dynamic relationships formed through their exchange. Her study brings forward the mechanisms that structured relations within the court, and most importantly, also with individuals, representations, and spaces outside the court. The book examines the courts of Italy through the wide variety of objects – statues, paintings, jewellery, furniture, and heraldry – that were valued for their subject matter, material forms, histories, and social functions. As Clark shows, the late fifteenth-century Italian court can be located not only in the body of the prince but also in the objects that constituted symbolic practices, initiated political dialogues, caused rifts, created memories, and formed associations.

Leah R. Clark is Lecturer in the Department of Art History at the Open University, UK. Her research explores the roles that the exchange, collection, and replication of objects played in the creation of social networks in the fifteenth century. She is co-editor of *European Art and the Wider World 1350–1550* (2017), and her work has appeared in a number of publications including the *Journal of the History of Collections*. She has received prestigious awards and fellowships from a variety of institutions including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the British Academy, and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

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IN THE ITALIAN
RENAISSANCE COURT
OBJECTS AND EXCHANGES

LEAH R. CLARK

The Open University

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We learn first as students and then as practitioners of disciplines, members of communities, users of libraries, habitués of archives, apprentices, and friends – as lurkers in particular intellectual, social, and institutional corners from which we look at the wide world. We see only one corner of the past or of the artistic or literary tradition, but we see it vividly, in color and perspective, because we know our set of sources so well and can study them in particular ways into which we have been initiated by teachers and by the keepers of libraries and archives. Our choices of topics, our uses of sources, and our ability to publish all of these results all hinge on our relationship with others as much as on our own abilities.

– Anthony Grafton, *Worlds Made by Words* (2009)

As Anthony Grafton remarks, it is a community of scholars that shapes one's thinking, and this book would not have been written without the numerous people I have met along the way: from the archivists and librarians to fellow scholars, but also those people not part of the academic or library world, such as the owner of a little restaurant in Naples who provided me with sustenance after a long day of research to the estate agent who found me a flat for six months in Modena.

When doing research in Italy, people always ask me how somebody born on the west coast of Canada became interested in Italian art. Our research interests are always in some ways informed by our own personal stories. My parents ran a sail-training organisation, and I grew up aboard a tall ship, sailing around the world. My interest in the mobility of objects was certainly influenced by the moving ship I called my home, but these interests also have ancestral roots. My ancestor Peter Rose first started selling second-hand goods during the time of the Napoleonic Wars, when he purchased some marine items acquired from the French and started a precursor to a chandlery. His son expanded the business, making his fortunes in the rag-and-bone industry in Bristol, collecting any unwanted possessions, which in turn would be sold for a profit. It is rumoured that some of the sails of the famous Bristol Channel Pilot cutters were purchased by the firm to make high-rag-content writing paper. My interest in pawning and credit and the circulation of second-hand goods in the Renaissance likely had its roots in my own family's history. Merchant

bankers in every age have found innovative ways of reinventing old things through the circulation of goods. Of course, issues around credit and the global economy are still pressing contemporary issues, which is why these subjects have become fervent areas of study in recent years.

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This book is an object who has had a long and arduous journey in its conception, but I hope that it does justice to the fascinating and wonderful objects it examines. Most importantly, I hope it opens new questions and new areas of research and provides stimulation for the reader.

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