

***Wealth and Beauty: Pier Francesco Foschi  
and Painting in Renaissance Florence***

Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia

Curated by Nelda Damiano

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This was the first exhibition dedicated to the lesser-known, but significant, Florentine painter Pier Francesco Foschi (1502–1567). Organized by Nelda Damiano, Pierre Daura Curator of European Art at the Georgia Museum of Art, the exhibition was both forward thinking and beautifully executed. *Wealth and Beauty* was an exceptionally insightful and timely show in Athens that was on exhibit from January 28 to April 24, 2022. In the wake of four masterful shows (*Cinquecento in Florence*, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 2018; *Michelangelo Divine Draftsman*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017–18; *Maniera*, Frankfurt, 2016; *Pontormo and Rosso Fiorentino*, Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, 2014) and postponed by a global pandemic, this informative four-gallery exhibition revived

momentum for a continued appreciation of sixteenth-century Florentine painting.

Pier Francesco Foschi clearly has one foot in the early Cinquecento painting tradition of his teacher Andrea del Sarto while the other is in *La Maniera* (Mannerism) or the “style of the day” being practiced by contemporaries Agnolo Bronzino, Giorgio Vasari, and Michele Tosini. Prior to entering the first of the four galleries, the viewer was met with a projected video installation of a nearly empty Piazza Santo Spirito. Silent drone footage shot by Matteo Nannelli during the early months of the pandemic captured the location of Foschi’s home parish and workshop. A part of us returned to thinking about pandemic days (perhaps reminded of the city of Florence which we could not visit for usual

study) while at the same time we were being pulled toward the reason we had come to the city of Athens, Georgia—the Foschi exhibition.

This exhibition strategically demonstrated Foschi's success in executing three altarpieces for Santo Spirito, his popularity in receiving private commissions for subjects such as the Madonna and Child (with or without St. John the Baptist and/or Joseph), and his mastery of lifelike portraiture. It reminded us of the contemporary importance placed on drawing or *disegno* and offered glimpses into contemporary life through a selection of period objects. These included a hunting sword from the Cleveland Museum of Art that accompanied his *Judith and Holofernes* from the Spier Collection; a Savonarola chair and manuscript account book from the Morgan Library; and a watch, an ink well, and a signet ring from the Ashmolean Museum. The walls of each gallery alternated between a deep rose and earthen grayish green, both of which complemented, rather than competed with, the works of art. It was well lit and visually appealing, encouraging visitors to linger and learn.

There were twenty-three paintings and fourteen drawings brought together from significant collections throughout the world. The Samuel

H. Kress Collection of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC lent *Charity* by Andrea del Sarto and *Portrait of Niccolò Ardinghelli* by Pontormo, which, along with two portraits of aristocratic women by Bronzino (Cleveland Museum of Art) and Puligo (David Owsley Museum of Art, Muncie, Indiana) and *Portrait of a Florentine Nobleman* (Saint Louis Art Museum), offered exceptional comparisons with Foschi paintings in American museums and galleries. These included *Portrait of Bartolomeo Compagni* (Cummer Museum of Art & Gardens, Jacksonville, Florida) and *Portrait of Gualterotti* (Philadelphia Museum of Art). Also from Philadelphia was the *Portrait of a Man* by Jacopino del Conti, another student of Andrea del Sarto in the 1520s. Pier Francesco Foschi and Jacopino del Conti were most likely not in the del Sarto workshop at the same time. Foschi was an independent master by 1525 and Jacopino studied in the bottega later in the decade. International loans brought together exquisite works from the Gallerie degli Uffizi (Florence), the Accademia di Firenze (Florence), the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza (Madrid), the Ashmolean Museum (University of Oxford), and the Royal Collection Trust (London).

Although the catalog was not yet in print at the writing of this review, the Georgia Museum of Art

curatorial staff generously provided a draft version. It promises to be an important contribution to sixteenth-century Florentine published scholarship. The catalog will contain four essays, each of which will undoubtedly add to the viewer's experience of the period and knowledge of the art of Foschi. Essays by Simone Giordani, David Franklin, Elizabeth Currie, and Nelda Damiano will offer distinct contributions to the study of Foschi and his times.

Giordani's "Rediscovering Pier Francesco Foschi: His Life and Works" does exactly what its title suggests in an informative and readable way, suitable for all levels of familiarity with the painter. It presents a thoughtful and nuanced introduction to the essence of Foschi in words that supplement the artist's work in paint. David Franklin sets out, according to his title, to situate Pier Francesco in sixteenth-century Florence and establish the artist's continued influence from Andrea del Sarto. Franklin's essay could have gone further with an expansion of Foschi's true contemporaries. When considering the birth years of the five "contemporary" painters discussed by Franklin (Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio, 1493; Pontormo, 1494; Bronzino, 1503; Salviati, 1510; Vasari, 1511), the latter three are, in fact, very close in age. This was an opportunity to

expand the reader's knowledge of other, lesser known but significant, contemporary Florentine painters. For example, to say that "Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, operating in close collaboration with Michele di Tosini, provides the closest parallel with Foschi, active within an esteemed tradition, regressing to the past" and then not to cite any Tosini scholarship and barely anything for Ridolfo, leaves the reader wanting clarification. In fact, Michele Tosini (1503–1577), discussed by Vasari in *Le vite* as Michele di Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio, was a direct contemporary of Foschi (1502–1567). Tosini lived longer and progressed into the Mannerist style, applying its principles far beyond Foschi. The illustrated San Salvi altarpiece should be attributed to both Ridolfo and Michele as it has been for many years. Franklin does correctly note that, in 1563, Foschi, alongside the painters Bronzino, Tosini, and Vasari and the sculptors Montorsoli and Francesco da Sangallo, formulated the rules for the founding of the Accademia del Disegno in Florence. The inclusion of a Tosini painting in the exhibition would have provided a comparison between equals as well as with an exact contemporary of Foschi.

Incorporating primary source material (*The Book of the Courtier* [*Il Cortegiano*], 1528; *Dialogue on*

*Colors*, 1566), health manuals, and contemporary sumptuary laws, the third essay by Elizabeth Currie gives us unexpected documentation for color gradation, sleeve quality, neckline appearance, and textile usage. The history of fashion and textiles is expanded in several catalog entries and enhances our understanding of not only Foschi but also the values and priorities of Florentines in the Cinquecento. Nelda Damiano's essay was not available at the time of this review.

*Wealth and Beauty* was well publicized through daily advertisements placed strategically at the top of the electronic version of *The ArtDaily Newsletter* for the duration of the show. Pier Francesco Foschi's *Portrait of a Woman* (Madrid: Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza) represented the forty-nine works (twenty-three paintings, fourteen drawings and twelve objects), enticing the potential visitor with the grace and elegance achieved by this significant Florentine master. This exhibition may inspire other curators and museums to venture into displaying the contributions of these very fine, but mostly unknown, masters in formulating a more thorough understanding of the artistic world of Cinquecento Florence.