History of Renaissance Art

Compositio and the Materiality of Architecture in the Italian Renaissance

Alina Payne

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- 1 The sources which Renaissance architects used to develop their architectural compositions were not strictly architectural but were drawn from a wider visual field, and often involved heterogeneous material. This was so because the ancient models, imperfectly preserved as amputated fragments and often only apprehensible through a great effort of the imagination, needed to be fleshed out by other means: by architectural representations on ancient coins, plaquettes, sculptural reliefs, cameos etc. It was also so because most artists were active as painters, architects, goldsmiths, woodcarvers and sculptors and were often working in many different media at one and the same time. As result of this complex interaction of artistic domains their architectural work was not limited to buildings but also involved experimental “architectural” compositions in furniture, metalwork, chancels, altars and altarpieces, tombs—in other words in a series of media and scales that were not those of architecture itself.
- 2 The categories traditionally associated with the activity of architectural design—from Vitruvius onwards— do not account for the materials and contexts upon which this activity drew and was deployed. They focus on the *how* not the *what*: as result what was brought into order (or composition) disappears from view. These lectures proposed to look at the material presence of these multiple sources for architecture, which, when taken under the magnifying glass of analysis cease to be transparent, and regain their “thickness”. The argument advanced is that *what* was being assembled—enlarged, minimized, placed into adjacency, translated from one material into another— was of as much consequence for the final design as *how* that assemblage was performed.

3 These issues were discussed with reference to specific case-studies that addressed four larger issues:

- I. Historiography of the topic
 - II. The architectural canvas: the Florentine sgraffito façade
 - III. Architecture and micro-architecture in the early Renaissance
 - IV. Portable archaeology and the drawing as ordering agent
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Subjects: Histoire de l'art de la Renaissance

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