



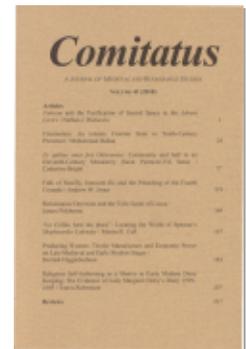
PROJECT MUSE®

*European Art in the Columbia Museum of Art, Including the Samuel H. Kress Collection, vol. 1: The Thirteenth through the Sixteenth Century* by Charles R. Mack (review)

Alison Locke Perchuk

*Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Volume 41, 2010, pp. 271-273 (Review)

Published by Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, UCLA  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/cjm.2010.0020>



➔ For additional information about this article  
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/540675/summary>

renaissance art and the dearth of scholarship devoted to the subject, this undertaking was well worth the risks involved.

JAMES FISHBURNE, Art History, UCLA

**Charles R. Mack, *European Art in the Columbia Museum of Art, Including the Samuel H. Kress Collection, vol. 1: The Thirteenth through the Sixteenth Century* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press 2009) 304 pp., color and b&w ill.**

In 1989, Charles R. Mack, William Joseph Todd Professor of the Italian Renaissance and Louise Fry Scudder Professor of Liberal Arts at the University of South Carolina, and a long-time associate of the Columbia Museum of Art (CMA, [www.columbiamuseum.org](http://www.columbiamuseum.org)), was commissioned by the museum to prepare the first comprehensive illustrated catalogue of its holdings of Renaissance and Baroque art. The impetus was the CMA's planned relocation, achieved in 1998. Reallocation of resources to the construction of a new museum building delayed the project's completion, but the result was worth the wait. With the support of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, Mack and the University of South Carolina Press have realized a beautifully produced and affordably priced catalogue that is much richer in content than initially planned. This first volume covers the Renaissance, ca. 1300 to 1600; a companion volume encompassing the Baroque and Rococo eras is planned.

The core of the CMA's collection of European art arrived between 1954 and 1974 in a series of gifts of paintings, sculptures, textiles, and furniture from the collection amassed by American entrepreneur Samuel H. Kress. Following a preface describing the history of the catalogue project, the volume fittingly offers a synthetic essay on the formation of the Kress Collection, its evolution from a private collection to a national resource, and the arrival of seventy-eight works of art at the CMA. While much of this material may be found in other sources, Mack has woven it into an engaging and effective narrative. A companion essay, detailing the history of the CMA, from the 1915 establishment of the Columbia Art Association and the museum's 1950 public opening to the present, is projected for the second volume.

The catalogue's primary goal is to make the CMA's collection accessible to a broad audience of students, specialists, and lay viewers. In this it succeeds admirably, not least because of the more than 100 high-quality illustrations, including color photographs (most occupying a full page) of every object detailed in the catalogue. A second introductory essay, directed toward non-specialist readers, charts a brief history of the Italian Renaissance through the works in the CMA's collection. The essay successfully sketches out the cultural and artistic milieu of late medieval and Renaissance Italy and presents key art historical concepts, including stylistic sequences and regional inflections. Where it falls short is in a lack of supplemental images. While Mack convincingly builds his history using objects in the CMA, he inevitably references major artists and artworks not represented elsewhere in the catalogue. In these cases, comparative images would have been useful.

In general, however, the book takes careful account of its readership. The catalogue proper begins with a three-page introduction that explains its chronological organization and the contents of each entry, and lists frequently

cited sources. Particularly useful in integrating academic and non-academic audiences is the explanation of common abbreviations placed at the start of the section. Also helpful is the brief but thoughtfully compiled glossary, which blends such technical terms as “gadrooning” and “crocket” with basic disciplinary vocabulary, including “ascribed” and “Trecento.” Collectively, these elements enhance the book’s accessibility.

This accessibility does not come at the price of scholarly value. Of the eighty-two works described in this first volume, fifty-six are treated in extended entries that augment sophisticated discussion of the work proper with a biography of the artist, reports on the object’s condition and framing, exhibition history, and detailed bibliography. The entries were prepared by Mack and graduate research assistants from the University of South Carolina’s program in art history, two of whom now hold leadership positions at the CMA.

Because Kress’s objective had been to establish a comprehensive collection that surveyed the breadth of Italian Renaissance and Baroque art, the CMA (like other museums that benefitted from his largesse) possesses works by a wide range of artists, mostly though not exclusively of Italian provenance. Within these holdings are several artworks unique in US collections, which thus constitute a particular resource for scholars. These include the only fresco by Sandro Botticelli in this country (no. 11). Several items offer the occasion for useful English-language biographies of lesser known artists, including Girolamo Genga (no. 27) and Matteo di Giovanni (no. 13). Yet others hold specific art historical interest, such as a bronze basin by Giovanni Alberghetti the Elder that hints at the reception of Etruscan art in sixteenth-century Italy (no. 21), a tondo of the Madonna and Child with Saints Francis and John the Baptist from the circle of Fra Bartolommeo (no. 23), a painting of the Annuciation by Girolamo da Santa Croce that records a lost work by Titian (no. 34), and a *sacra conversazione* by Bonifacio de’ Pitati, who helped train several of the major figures of late Renaissance painting in Venice (no. 35). While the collection is heavily weighted toward Italy, it does also contain notable works from other parts of Europe, including a graceful statue of St Anne and the Virgin from the circle of the Master of the Füssener Altarpiece (no. 9). Paintings and sculptures are supplemented by works on paper (including a beautiful ink wash tentatively attributed to Marco Pino da Siena, no. 39), stained glass, textiles, and several well preserved examples of sixteenth-century furniture (e.g., a carved *cassone* made for the Del Cinque family of Rome, no. 38).

I do have a few minor criticisms. The attribution to Deodato Orlandi of a Madonna and Child of ca. 1290 (no. 1) depends heavily upon one of the most standardized aspects of late medieval painting, the faces of the Virgin and the Christ Child; I would urge its further evaluation. The motif of the nursing Madonna was not new in the fourteenth century, as stated in the entry for Andrea Solario’s *Madonna Nursing the Christ Child (Maria lactans)* (no. 20), but has a history stretching back to the Early Christian era. The catalogue’s largest problem, however, is in the quality of its copy editing, including the spelling of technical terms. Sporadic typographical errors are annoying, but mistakes such as “Walter’s Gallery” (for the Walters Art Gallery, now the Walters Art Museum) or “Maria lactens” (for “Maria lactans”), the latter even appearing in the glossary, should not occur in a work issued by a university press.

These small points aside, Mack, his former research assistants, and the CMA are to be commended for a crisply written and beautifully illustrated catalogue of scholarly value that attains its stated goal of sharing with a broad audience the CMA's European art collection, including its portion of the Kress legacy.

ALISON LOCKE PERCHUK, Art History and Visual Arts, Occidental College

**Marta Madero, *Tabula Picta. Painting and Writing in Medieval Law*, trans. Monique Dascha Inciarte and Roland David Valayre, foreword by Roger Chartier (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press) 176 pp.**

This volume is an excellent English translation of *La peinture et l'écriture dans le droit médiéval* by Marta Madero, a brilliant description and analysis of the concept of *Tabula picta* of great interest to historians of Middle Ages, to cultural historians, and to specialists in the history of law and legal studies. This compact volume, presented in eleven brief chapters, is the result of a series of studies begun during a seminar on labor in Roman law at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, where Madero had heard the French historian of law Yan Thomas speak briefly of the *tabula picta* and found what he had said fascinating. Madero summarizes these studies, defines a history of the ownership of artistic productions and a history of the concept of material objects (13–14), and provides a detailed list of lawyers (e.g. Gaius, Azo, Alciat, Speluncanus) who tackled the subject in ancient times.

The question of who owns an image, namely, the artist or the person who owns the panel upon which it is painted, is formulated in early Roman law in terms of ownership by *accessio* or accession. Madero's book contextualizes the problem and provides numerous examples and sources. In particular she analyzes texts and sources from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries. In general, this book throws new light on the history of the legal and artistic concept of ownership and copyright and on a specific period of art, the Middle Ages. This volume provides an opportunity to consider or reconsider concepts which seem in recent years to have been on the sidelines of art history.

A minor fault can be found in the absence of images throughout the book, except for the beautiful cover image, a miniature from a fifteenth century. Also, some of the more difficult legal concepts could have been explained and explored a bit further. The book is nonetheless an inspiring and well-structured piece of work.

GIULIA SAVIO, University of Genoa

***Medieval Domesticity: Home, Housing and Household in Medieval England*, ed. Maryanne Kowalesky and P. J. P. Goldberg. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008) xiv + 317 pp., ill., maps.**

As an increasing number of scholars in recent years have turned to issues of everyday life in the Middle Ages, the number of articles and books dedicated to the various facets of this topic has risen. Recent investigations of the home and its inhabitants led to some new, and more personalized insights into the daily lives and dealings of medieval people across Europe and the Mediterranean world. Aspects of daily life can provide interesting evidence for the late medieval period as a whole, for the regulations of its body politic, as well as for the mechanisms of both public and intimate relationships. Kowalesky and Gold-