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Year: 2016

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**Rezension von: J. Nicholas Napoli: The Ethics of Ornament in Early Modern Naples.  
Fashioning the Certosa di San Martino (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015)**

van Gastel, Joris

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/689069>

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ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-158836>

Journal Article

Published Version

Originally published at:

van Gastel, Joris (2016). Rezension von: J. Nicholas Napoli: The Ethics of Ornament in Early Modern Naples. Fashioning the Certosa di San Martino (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015). *Renaissance Quarterly*, 69(3):1058-1059.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1086/689069>

*The Ethics of Ornament in Early Modern Naples: Fashioning the Certosa di San Martino.* John Nicholas Napoli.

Visual Culture in Early Modernity. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015. xvi + 414 pp. \$109.95.

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With his *Ethics of Ornament*, J. Nicholas Napoli has written the first book-length study in English of what is surely the most important monument of the Neapolitan Baroque: the Certosa di San Martino. Perched high on the hill of Vomero, overlooking the city and the bay, there is hardly any artist of note working in early modern Naples who has not contributed to its stunning decorations. The most lasting impression, however, is without doubt that left by sculptor and architect Cosimo Fanzago, who with his marble revetments and sculptural ornament prompted a fashion that would become characteristic of the Neapolitan Baroque as a whole. Not without reason, then, Fanzago is one of the main characters of this book.

Contrary to what the title may suggest, however, this is not a book about ornament, or, at least, not about ornament in the strict sense of the word. As the author explains in his introduction, he defines *ornament* as “all interventions — pictorial, sculptural, architectonic — that serve to cover and to enhance the interior and exterior surfaces of the built environment” (5). If such a definition makes it difficult to relate this work to classic studies on ornament by such authors as Ernst Gombrich or Oleg Grabar, it does point at something that, arguably, is specific for Naples: the “remarkable consonance of visual form between figurative sculpture, painting, architectonic sculpture, and marble revetment” — a consonance, one may add, that beyond form can be found as well in the “overwhelming material richness of the ensemble” (3).

The first two chapters of the book deal with the question of ornament only in the broadest sense, providing the reader with the early history of the monastery, as well as an

arguably all-too-broad discussion of the Carthusian Order. Focusing on the monastery's "decorative program" (94) in the second chapter, the author basically provides an iconographical reading of the chapel decorations, leaving open the question as to how the paintings and sculptures discussed here can be seen as an integral part of the church's ornament, and thus as a part of its material and formal interwovenness. In the third chapter the book gradually gathers speed. As the author argues in this chapter, in seventeenth-century Naples, the relationship between patrons and artists was built on a basis of trust, a trust that, at least in the eyes of the Carthusians, Fanzago had betrayed. The lawsuit that ensued has resulted in a set of documents giving a unique insight not only into the dealings between patrons and artists, but also into Fanzago's workshop practice and the way his work was perceived. In the chapter that follows, it becomes clear that Fanzago's betrayal was born out of necessity. Working on different projects throughout the city at the same time, he had developed a system that allowed him to "mix and match" elements between sites, "installing components in a series of spontaneous improvisations" (198). If such a system clearly asked a bit too much of the patrons' trust, the possibilities of reuse and improvisation it provided made it particularly adequate for the unpredictable society of seventeenth-century Naples.

Indeed, the Carthusians notwithstanding, Fanzago's system caught on in Naples, allowing not only the completion of the Certosa in the eighteenth century in a highly uniform manner, but also the spread of his invention throughout the city and beyond. That this could count on the appreciation of contemporaries, at least in Carthusian circles, is borne out by the records of chapter visits (*Cartae de visita*) unearthed by Napoli, though soon less favorable accounts started to appear. Clearly, with an eye accustomed to Rome, Naples was — and, for some, maybe still is — not easy to appreciate. But Fanzago had to work with a very different set of parameters than that of Bernini's and Borromini's Rome, which still sets the art historical standard.

Though surely not the last word on the Certosa, this book adds significantly to our understanding of both the monument and more general aspects of patronage and workshop practice in Baroque Naples. Moreover, and maybe more importantly, the book points the way to a discussion of Neapolitan Baroque art on its own terms, the implications of which reach far beyond the monastery of San Martino.

Joris van Gastel, *Bibliotheca Hertziana*