

Art on the Move in Renaissance Italy

David Landau

London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2025. ISBN 9781915401168.

In his lengthy and beautifully illustrated book, *Art on the Move in Renaissance Italy*, David Landau moves beyond his specialized focus on printmaking to chart the movement of artists, artworks, materials, and information in Italy at the turn of the sixteenth century. He approaches this broad task by focusing on the year 1506 (although occasionally looking at works from no earlier than 1490). One of the central and most surprising claims of the book is that artists' travel resulted less in the dissemination of new styles and innovative techniques, and more in the heightened social status of the artist, as they mingled with foreign humanists, patrons, and artists. For example, after traveling to Venice in 1506, Albrecht Dürer transformed from "celebrated craftsman to thinker, theoretician and gentleman."¹ Steering clear of attempts to theorize issues of style, influence, and mobility, Landau evokes the physical realities of travel for artists and objects in the Renaissance, while also addressing the ways in which images moved across different media as new techniques of replication emerged.

After a very short introduction laying out the scope of the book, a long chapter ("A Cosmopolitan Peninsula") serves as an excellent overview of the modes, purposes, and contexts of travel in Renaissance Italy. Two chapters are dedicated to media (frescoes and sculpture, respectively), while two chapters examine the letters of individuals from 1506 (those of an artist, Albrecht Dürer, and a patron, Isabella d'Este). A chapter titled "Movables and Multiples" focuses on new types of small-scale domestic objects that became very popular around 1490-1510, such as bronze statuettes that were often copies of antiquities. Here, Landau has a significant intervention on prints produced in Italy just before 1506, as he points out that the important engravings of Mantua, Bologna, and the Veneto did not travel widely across the peninsula but circulated very locally and hence had a limited impact on the broader art scene. Indeed, a surprising amount of *Art on the Move* concerns artwork that did not move, such as Chapter Two ("*Frescanti Erranti*"), which focuses on the eminently static medium of fresco painting. Landau writes eloquently about itinerant painters who travelled across Italy for fresco commissions, arguing that Pinturicchio (1454–1513) was especially gifted in establishing temporary workshops, where he trained local artists *ad hoc*.² This issue of the workshop is one of the most intriguing parts of the book: in contrast to Pinturicchio, Pietro Perugino (c. 1446–1523) did not need to travel for his artistic persona to assert itself, as he had established workshops in Florence and Perugia. This tension between travel and rootedness runs throughout the book, even if it is not explicitly addressed.

By only utilizing primary sources and artworks before 1507, Landau explicitly tells a history of Italian art without the ideas and terminology of Giorgio Vasari (1511–74), who in his 1550 *Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* propagates an emphatic

1 David Landau, *Art on the Move in Renaissance Italy* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2025), 431.

2 Landau, *Art on the Move*, 102.

cally Florence-centric vision of art history. In so doing, Landau avoids sustained dialogue with David Young Kim's 2014 *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance*, which focuses on the relationship between style and mobility in Vasari's *Lives*, especially the writer's anxiety over the contamination of style through travel.³ Stephen Campbell's 2019 *The Endless Periphery: Toward a Geopolitics of Art in Lorenzo Lotto's Italy* presents an understanding of the Italian Renaissance "without Vasari," as he focuses on artists like Lorenzo Lotto, who began traveling to smaller cities for commissions just before 1506.⁴ Surprisingly, Landau does not pull from Campbell's conceptualization of peripheries as sites of artistic and cultural resistance to centers like Florence, Rome, and Venice. Nor does Landau explore the captivating possibility that works of art registered their future movement in their form and content, as Jennifer Roberts argues in the context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American painters in her book *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (2014).⁵

Indeed, this is not an art history book that involves lengthy, sustained analysis of particular works of art. Instead, many images are cited in service of broader points, such as when Landau argues for the relative lack of influence of Italian art on Dürer during his Venetian trip. While Landau recognizes the cultural significance of artworks, precious commodities, and people that traveled into Italy from across the world, he generally downplays the influence of movement *within Italy* on the form and content of art. While Landau emphasizes novel artistic developments around the year 1500, further explanation is required as to why 1506 is such an important *terminus ante quem*.⁶ The reason, I suspect, may relate to developments in the reproductive print that happened shortly after, as around 1510 Marcantonio Raimondi produced important engravings after works by Michelangelo and Raphael. Figures by these artists, such as nude men from Michelangelo's 1504–05 *Battle of Cascina* cartoon, swiftly became canonical through the widespread circulation of prints throughout Italy.⁷ In this post-1506 context, the relationship between art and mobility shifted, as canonical art became more immediately accessible. Landau also might have considered travel in an expanded context, particularly in the domain of the sacred. For example, what about art that traveled repeatedly, in regulated, ritual processions?⁸ Also, what was the impact of art that miraculously traveled, such as the *Volto Santo* crucifix of Lucca Cathedral, which supposedly journeyed through divine volition from Jerusalem to the coast of Italy in the eighth century? Following its new enshrinement at the end of the fifteenth century, several contemporaneous Tuscan altarpieces portrayed the well-traveled statue at center.⁹

3 David Young Kim, *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance: Geography, Mobility, and Style* (Yale University Press, 2014).

4 Stephen Campbell, *The Endless Periphery: Toward a Geopolitics of Art in Lorenzo Lotto's Italy* (The University of Chicago Press, 2019).

5 Jennifer Roberts, *Transporting Visions: The Movement of Images in Early America* (University of California Press, 2014).

6 That is, beyond it being the death year of Andrea Mantegna, who Landau co-curated a show on at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Royal Academy of Arts, 1992.

7 Lisa Pon, *Raphael, Dürer, and Marcantonio Raimondi: Copying and the Italian Renaissance Print* (Yale University Press, 2004); On the canonical status of Michelangelo's figures from the *Battle of Cascina*, due to Raimondi's prints, see Joost Keizer, "Michelangelo, Drawing, and the Subject of Art," *The Art Bulletin* (2011): 314; On "canonicity" in the art of Raphael, see Robert Williams, *Raphael and the Redefinition of Art in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 90ff.

8 Victor M. Schmidt, *Stendardi e gonfaloni processionali dalle Marche. Tardo Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Centro Studi G. Mazzini, 2020).

9 For example, see Piero di Cosimo's altarpiece dated to around 1490–1510, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, inv.

In the opening line, Landau proclaims that the book is “like an enormous footnote to the history of the Italian Renaissance.”¹⁰ Given this quip, it is noticeable that the many endnotes are rather bare, with little commentary. There were frequent omissions of page numbers, making it difficult to follow-up on the fascinating material. Chapters were cited by providing the author’s name in the edited book, but the actual name of the essay was absent from both endnote and bibliography. Yet beyond this, the monograph is a valuable resource for any graduate student or scholar who wants to discover more about the mobility of art and artists across Italy in those years just before Michelangelo and Raphael established a Roman canon of art through their work at the Vatican. As art historians assess the impact of movement on the content, forms, and iconography of Renaissance art, one hopes that Landau’s book prompts them to consider the labor of transporting marble hundreds of miles prior to the first strike of the chisel, the encasement of panel paintings for shipment to patrons, and the feelings of alienation painters may have felt in foreign cities, bereft of their usual, reliable assistants.

1100; On the *Volto Santo*, see Stefano Martinelli, *Il Volto Santo di Lucca: Il successo europeo di un’iconografia medievale* (Edizioni ETS, 2016).

10 Landau, *Art on the Move*, 9.