The Lady Anatomist: The Life and Work of Anna Morandi Manzolini by Rebecca Messbarger, University of Chicago Press, December 2010. 234 p. ill. alk. ISBN 9780226520810 (cl.), $35.00

Messbarger traces Anna Morandi Manzolini's life's work in anatomical study and the resultant wax works with the backdrop of Bologna and the shift of scientific study during the eighteenth century. With her husband Giovanni, Anna studied the human body through exacting dissections and subsequently created colored wax models of each part of the human body. Proving to be much better at teaching than her husband, Anna lectured from their home laboratory to anatomy students using their extensive wax models as tools. She continued teaching after his death.

Bologna during Manzolini's lifetime was in the process of reinventing itself into a university city to rival other such cities in Europe. While the University of Bologna had declined in the seventeenth century due to the imposition of theoretical over practical and experimental teaching and the granting of professorships based on Bologna citizenry rather than on merit, a distinct change was begun. This change was due to two forward-looking patrons, General Luigi Ferdinando Marsili, who founded the Institute of Sciences, and Prospero Lambertini, a Bolognese nobleman who became Pope Benedict XIV. It was Pope Benedict who pushed for the study of anatomy and medical science as the core of the new Institute of Sciences. He also found it advantageous to promote the "Lady Anatomist" as a destination for Grand Tour participants, thus increasing the visibility of his native city. The "official" anatomy artist at the Institute, appointed by Pope Benedict, was Ercole Lelli, whose full body wax works were meant for study by artists, not anatomists. This friction between conservative official anatomy and the new empirical anatomy practiced and promoted by the Manzolinis outside the University proper is the backdrop for Messbarger's story of Anna's life's work.

Messbarger uses Anna's letters to renowned anatomists of European and extensive anatomical notes to explain the dichotomy between Anna's expertise on the one hand and her lack of recognition on the other.

There is much to be gained in the study of women artists from this period in a setting outside traditional art historic placement. There is a bit of repetition within the book. A certain knowledge of gender study authors is assumed, as they are periodically mentioned but not explained thoroughly. However, in all, this is an interesting and well-illustrated story, that would certainly be an important addition to an art library within a scientific/medical school.

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