The Art of Emblazoning and some Portraits of Agnola Bronzino

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Thanks to such studies as Jonathan Sawday’s The Body Emblazoned and Alison Saunders’ The Sixteenth Century Blason Poétique, we are in a better position to understand the practice and impact of emblazoning in sixteenth and seventeenth century culture and literature. Succinctly put, emblazoning was the art of isolating, partitioning, or putting into relief a component of an organic series for close observation and display that could serve innumerable purposes in such fields as descriptive anatomy, the fine arts, literature, emblematics, pedagogy, cartography, satire, or public performance. There is an art of emblazoning at work in the mannerist paintings of Agnolo Bronzino (1503-1572) in which a partial whole opens up a wide range of symbolic meanings in microcosm reflecting the Vasarian principle of invenzione copiosa di tutte le cose abundant invention continued in the smallest things. Proceeding chronologically, I will examine the wandering left eye of the courtier in the Portrait of the Young Man, the puffed-out shoulder sleeves in the portrait of Lucrezia Panchiatici, the flayed foot of the Saint Bartholomew fragment in the pala for the Altar of the Graces in Pisa, and finally, the profile of the aquiline nose of Laura Battiferri. Finally, I will offer some general points about the tensions between part and whole, analysis and synthesis, the fetish and Platonic idealism.

Michael J. Giordano is Professor of French and Graduate Advisor in the Department of Classical and Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. His specialization is French Renaissance and Baroque literature and culture with particular attention to poetry, emblematics, iconography, and the intersections and tensions between the religious and the secular. His publications include studies on Maurice Scève, Joachim Du Bellay, Michel de Montaigne, and Bérolade de Verville as well more general work on the concept of emblematics in Gilles Deleuze and the interconnections between the anatomical blazon and other cultural phenomena such as painting and descriptive anatomy. He serves on the Advisory Board of the International Society for Emblem Studies. Also, he is the recipient of the President’s Award for Excellence in Teaching, The Graduate Student Mentoring Award, and last Spring of the Board of Governors’ Recognition Award for his book The Art of Meditation in the French Renaissance Love Lyric (University of Toronto, 2010). His current project is a book on the Renaissance anatomical blazon.