

Introduction

Rome's modern footprint is a *mélange* of past and present that invariably recalls the city's long history. The labyrinthine lanes and alley offshoots extending from the Campo dei Fiori or piazza Navona, for example, recall the city's organic evolution from the Middle Ages while beguiling contemporary sightseers with an air of suspense at every turn. Meanwhile, the broad via Giulia and the even more boulevard-like via del Corso reinforce several early modern campaigns to redevelop the city and still dazzle tourists today with their imposing edifices alternating between extravagant palazzi and churches. At the same time, this pastiche of temporalities encourages investigating this landscape's many historical layers, some of which have obscured others. Landmark additions to the city's fabric, like the Trevi Fountain or Spanish Steps of the eighteenth century, as well as recarved thoroughfares, such as the Corso Vittorio Emanuele II or the via della Conciliazione, imposed between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in turn erased architectural facets while simultaneously dismantling constructed familial legacies across the urban environment.¹ Thus, while Rome's modern travelers can be intoxicated by these topographical intersections of history, they must simultaneously recognize that vital pieces of the civic, architectural, and artistic legacy that framed them are either gone or have been reduced to shadows of what they once were.

Falling victim to such a vanishing act is the frescoed façade, which lurks today primarily in fragments hidden in the upper reaches of some of the *centro storico's* multi-story buildings. Observant visitors who look up might catch a glimpse of partial acanthus curls or faded portrait contours, ghostly palimpsests of a once extensive tradition of decorating one's façade with fresco and sgraffito (fig. 1). Appearing across the city but seemingly concentrated in the core *rioni* of Regola, S. Eustachio, Parione, and Ponte, this artistic mode thrived amid the city's socially

1 For more, see: John Pinto, "The Trevi Fountain and Its Place in the Urban Development of Rome," *AA Files* 8 (1985): 8–20; Linda Boyer Gillies, "An Eighteenth-Century Roman View: Panini's Scalinata Della Trinità Dei Monti," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 30, no. 4 (1972): 177–84; Willemijn van Dijk and Robert Naborn, *Via Roma: The History of Rome in Fifty Streets* (Baylor University Press, 2018); Aristotle Kallis, *The Third Rome 1922–1943: The Making of the Fascist Capital* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Claudio Parisi Presicce and Laura Petacco, *La Spina: Dall'agro Vaticano a Via della Conciliazione* (Gangemi editore, 2016).



Fig. 1: Fragmentary façade decorations visible on the home at vicolo Sugarelli, 1–2 (photo: Valeria Castiello, 2023).

dynamic atmosphere and increasingly ambitious architectural language for domestic spaces that developed across the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. So dazzling were these “painted faces” that they were once sensationalized by Giorgio Vasari as being filled with “innumerable things of fancy so strange that mortal eyes could not picture anything more novel or more beautiful.”² One can imagine, even with only remnants surviving, how these façades would have enlivened one’s street-side stroll. Couched within this surface embellishment, however, was often a web of symbolic social, political, and familial allegiances writ large in pigment and plaster.

With so many of these faces now lost, though, our understanding of what they comprised is frighteningly incomplete. Moreover, the legacy of this visual tradition has mostly been pushed to the periphery of period studies, and the perpetual decay of its few contemporary reminders continues to nudge this fascinating artistic turn toward the precipice of total obscurity. This book aims to prevent such an untimely end by reinvesting the tradition at the core of Renaissance visual culture

2 “lavorate con tante bizzarrie dentro, che occhio mortale non potrebbe immaginarsi altro né più bello né più nuovo ... da rimaner confuse per la moltiplicazione e copia di sì belle e capricciose fantasie, ch’uscivano loro de la mente.” Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de’ piu eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori* (1568), ed. Gaetano Milanesi (Firenze: Giunti, 1568), III: 198.

to reignite interest before the last vestiges of these frescoes disappear. In addition to offering an updated compilation of these documented façades, this book also places refreshed emphasis on their making and meaning to provide new insights into patron identity, public display, and painterly innovation all set within a city that at the time was undergoing its own reinvention.

Though on basic terms a superficial decorative flourish, the Roman frescoed façade—which ranged from streamlined fictive stone courses to elaborate scenographic spectacles comprising friezes, crests, and narrative vignettes from antiquity—carried profound implications that deserve further investigation given the motifs and moment in which they flourished. The first is the crucial role these façades would have played in constructing a patron's public self-fashioning. Partially, this importance is owed to the simple fact that they adorned a dwelling's face, a space along with location that in the period signified status or allegiance. From the theory of magnificence as promulgated in the writings of Marsilio Ficino (*De virtutibus morabilibus*, 1457) to the writings of Paolo Cortesi, whose *De Cardinalatu* (1510) advocated for the importance of the site and design of cardinals' Roman palaces, an emerging peninsula-wide dialogue regarding the mindful presentations of one's self played a central role in the evolution of the Roman domestic architectural landscape.³ This awareness, when combined with newly defined arteries throughout Rome used for both celebration and commerce, surely enhanced attention to the placement and appearance of one's abode.

Moreover, the patterns of placement that emerge when these façades are mapped across Rome seem to further reinforce their role in self-fashioning along central urban thoroughfares. While the extraordinarily wealthy could engulf entire city blocks with imposing palazzi that commanded attention for their sheer size and finery of revetment, it would seem that those upwardly mobile yet less equipped to afford such elegant details on their more modest *case* or *palazzetti* turned to fresco as a means to stake their claim in the urban landscape and to transform what otherwise might have been a plain stucco face into a delightful panoply of decorations. David Franklin surmised that the dearth of frescoed façade decoration on the homes of the most wealthy was owed to an allegiance to aristocratic restraint, noting that “the bold public nature of the frescoes was unusual and may even have discouraged more reticent and venerable families from considering them, including the baronials.”⁴ While such reserve might have played a role, it seems equally—if

3 Paolo Cortesi, *Pauli Cortesii Protonotarii Apostolici de Cardinalatu ... Ad Iulian Secundum* (Siena: In Castro Cortesio: Quos Symeon Nicolai Nardi senensis alias Rufus Calchographus imprimebat, 1510–13). For analysis of this chapter, see: Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt and John F. D'Amico, “The Renaissance Cardinal's Ideal Palace: A Chapter from Cortesi's *De Cardinalatu*,” in *Studies in Italian Art and Architecture: 15th through 18th Centuries*, ed. Henry A. Million (Edizioni dell'Elefante, 1980), 45–119.

4 David Franklin, *Polidoro da Caravaggio* (Yale University Press, 2018), 43.

not more—plausible that the prevalence of these frescoes on more modest façades reflected their role in mirroring their patron's aspirations.

These decorated faces also served as dynamic loci for theoretical and aesthetic exchanges between art and architecture as well as between ancient and contemporary ideologies during an especially transformative period for the city. On the one hand, the use of borrowed *all'antica* phrases in these façade designs not only continued the conversation over self-fashioning but further blurred past and present and thus welcomes a deeper probing of the use, reuse, and re-imagining of antique elements. On the other hand, the façade created a nexus in which architectural theory could confront artistic practice in a particularly charged moment. As artists explored the fictive surface and its potential to relay fantastical themes, so too did architects need to confront the role of ornamentation in the transformation of one's façade. This same creative space opened the door to intermedial exchange with other fields including decorative arts and theatrical scenography that often expressed a fluidity between a form's fixedness and ethereality, or temporality.

Despite this rich potential for analysis and insight, Rome's decorated façades are surprisingly some of the least studied in all of Europe. Only a handful of period chroniclers and scholars attempted to document these spaces, a dearth perhaps owed to the fact that, as Patricia Reilly has noted, *chiaroscuro* was still not fully recognized as an art form even into the early decades of the sixteenth century.⁵ Those who did document these façades did so with varying degrees of precision. Among these writers was, as mentioned earlier, Vasari, who was the first to relay examples of these projects in *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori* (1550 and 1568).⁶ Following suit in the seventeenth century was Giovanni Baglione, whose *Le vite de' pittori, scultori et architettori* (first published 1642) was modeled after Vasari's text and thus similarly offered snippets on these façades interspersed in a larger catalog of biographies.⁷ The same period also saw the publication of chronicles by papal consort Giulio Mancini and painter Gaspare Celio, whose

5 Patricia Reilly, "Triumphal Chiaroscuro Painting During the Reign of Julius II," in *Eternal Ephemera: The Papal Possesso and Its Legacies*, ed. Jennifer Mara DeSilva and Pascale Rihouet (Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2020), 130.

6 Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, ed architettori*.

7 Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori scultori et architetti* (Rome, 1642), ed. Barbara Agosti and Patrizia Tosini (Officina Libraria, 2023). One could also note Raffaello Borghini's *Il Riposo* (1584) and Giovanni Battista Armenini's *De' veri precetti della pittura* (1587), both of which mention some of these façade projects. For more, see: Raffaello Borghini, *Il Riposo di Raffaello Borghini in cui della pittura e della scultura si fa uella de' più illustri pittori e scultori e delle più famose opere loro si fa mentione; e le cose principali appartenenti à dette arti s'insegnano: All'illustriss. et eccelentis. sig. Padron ... Il Sig. Don Giovanni Medici* (Florence, 1584); Giovanni Battista Armenini, *De' veri precetti della pittura* (Ravenna, 1587), ed. Marina Gorreri (G. Einaudi, 1988).

Viaggio di Roma per vedere le pitture (1632) and *Memoria delli nomi dell'artefici delle pitture che sono in alcune chiese, facciate, e palazzi di Roma* (1637–38), respectively, were some of the first art travelogues to feature sections specifically dedicated to discussing decorated façades.⁸

The following centuries witnessed rather infrequent additions to the field, with the next substantial wave of scholarship on these façades ascending in the nineteenth century.⁹ Paul Marie Letarouilly's colossal compendium, *Édifices du Rome Moderne* (the first volume of which was published in Paris in 1840) included some of the first illustrations of these façades intermixed with other Roman architectural landmarks.¹⁰ Several decades later, Enrico Maccari's prints included in his collaborative publication with Giovanni Iannoni, *Graffiti e chiaroscuri esistenti nell'esterno delle case* (1876) (fig. 2), emerged as one of the best visual records of the state of these frescoed façades in that era.¹¹ Documentation of decorated façades was also woven into the *Inventario dei monumenti di Roma* (1908–12) and became the crux of Werner Hirschfeld's 1911 dissertation (*Quellenstudien zur Geschichte der Fassadenmalerei in Rom im XVI und XVIII Jahrhundert*) that cataloged façades by primarily compiling prior accounts like those of Mancini and Celio.¹² Umberto Gnoli produced a similar compendium in 1938 (*Facciate graffite e dipinte in Roma*) that

8 Giulio Mancini, *Viaggio di Roma per vedere le pitture* (1623), ed. Ludwig Schudt (Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1923); Gaspare Celio, *Memoria delli nomi dell'artefici delle pitture che sono in alcune chiese facciate e palazzi di Roma*. Facsimile of the 1638 Neapolitan edition; ed. Emma Zocca (Electa, 1967). One additional seventeenth-century inventory discovered in the Biblioteca Casanatense by Maria Cristina Dorati da Empoli noted façades by both Polidoro da Caravaggio and Taddeo Zuccaro but only in passing reference. For more, see: Mara Cristina Dorati da Empoli, *Una guida artistica di Roma in un manoscritto secentesco anonimo* (Gangemi, 2001).

9 Several additional texts published in the eighteenth century provided partial inventories of these decorated façades. For more, see: Giovanni Francesco Cecconi, *Roma sacra e moderna già descritta dal Pancirolo ed accresciuta da Francesco Posterla ...* (Rome: Girolamo Mainardi, 1725); Gregorio Roisecco and Ottavio Puccinelli, *Roma antica e moderna o sia nuova descrizione di tutti gl'edificj antichi e moderni tanto sagri quanto profani della città di roma ...* (Rome: Appresso Gregorio Roisecco, 1750); Giuseppe Vasi, *Itinerario istruttivo diviso in otto giornate per ritrovare con facilità tutte le antiche e moderne magnificenze di roma*, 3 vols. (Rome: A. Casaletti, 1777); and F. M. Tassi, *Vite de' pittori scultori e architetti bergamaschi* (Bergamo: Locatelli, 1793).

10 Paul Marie Letarouilly, *Édifices de Rome moderne; ou, Recueil des palais, maisons, églises, couvents et autres monuments publics et particuliers les plus remarquables de la ville de Rome*, 4 vols. (Paris: Didot Frères, 1840–57).

11 Enrico Maccari and Giovanni Iannoni, *Graffiti e chiaroscuri esistenti nell'esterno delle case* (Berlin: Wasmuth, 1876). Though valuable, Maccari's prints also reflect manipulations to some façade designs. For more, see: Clara Pacchiotti, "Nuove Attribuzioni a Polidoro da Caravaggio in Roma: La Facciata a Vicolo del Campanile," *L'Arte: Rivista di storia dell'arte medioevale e moderna* 30 (1927): 196–98.

12 *Inventario dei monumenti di Roma* (Associazione Artistica fra i Cultori di Architettura, 1908–12); Werner Hirschfeld, *Quellenstudien zur Geschichte der Fassadenmalerei in Rom im XVI und XVIII Jahrhundert* (Druck von Ehrhardt Karras, 1911).

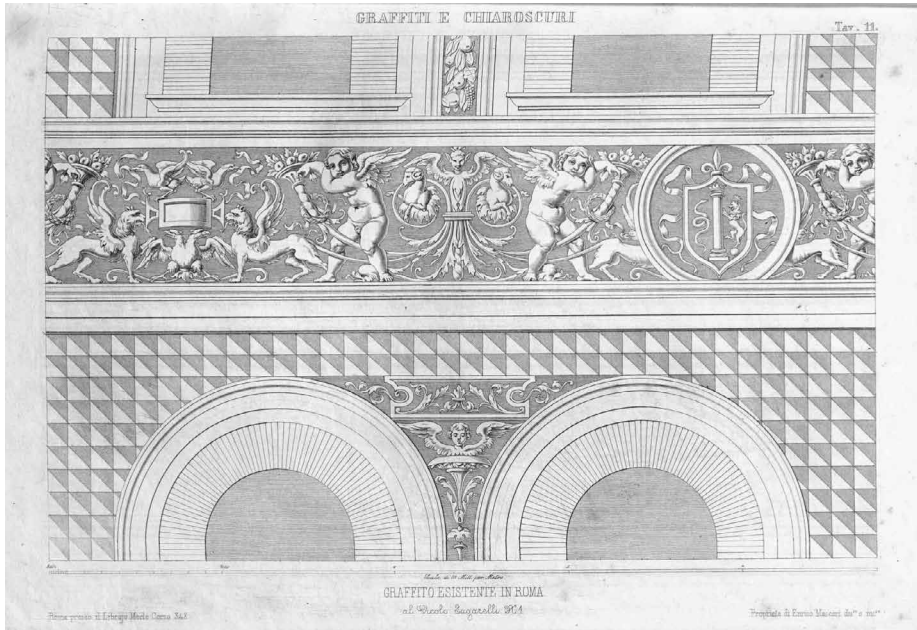


Fig. 2: Enrico Maccari, “Graffito Esistente in Roma al Vicolo Sugarelli, No. 1,” showcasing additional insights into the remaining fragments at this property address today (fig. 1). As illustrated in: Maccari and Iannoni, *Graffiti e chiaroscuri*, table 11.

was paralleled in the early work by Piero Tomei, whose studies in Roman palazzo architecture and civic infrastructure reflected a growing interest in mapping the city’s evolution.¹³

The second half of the century witnessed two key scholarly contributions on the topic of the decorated façade. The first was Cecilia Pericoli Ridolfini’s *Le case romane con facciate graffite e dipinte* (1960), the accompanying catalog for an Amici dei musei di Roma exhibition held at the palazzo Braschi (November–December 1960).¹⁴ Pericoli Ridolfini’s book echoed the format of Gnoli’s text while also borrowing heavily from it, yet the addition of (some) imagery situates Pericoli Ridolfini’s catalog as a valuable addition among these scholarly landmarks. Maria Errico, Stella Sandra Finozzi, and Irene Giglio built upon Pericoli Ridolfini’s exhibition catalog with *Ricognizione e schedature delle facciate affrescate e graffite a Roma nei secoli XV e XVI* (1985), which offered one of the first attempts to map a subset of these façades

13 Umberto Gnoli, *Facciate graffite e dipinte in Roma* (Casa Vasari, 1938). An earlier version of this account with slight variations was published the prior year: Umberto Gnoli, “Facciate graffite e dipinte in Roma,” *Il Vasari* 8 (1936–37): 89–123; Piero Tomei, *L’architettura a Roma nel Quattrocento* (Multigrafica, 1977).

14 Cecilia Pericoli Ridolfini, *Le case romane con facciate graffite e dipinte: Catalogo* (Stabilimento Grafico F. Capriotti, 1960).

across the city.¹⁵ Further honing the potential in such mapping, Ebe Giacometti and Floriana Mauro later skillfully rebuilt the placement of roughly twenty of the lost frescoed façades from the Borgo.¹⁶ In their painstaking reconstruction of a neighborhood slowly demolished from the seventeenth century—to make way for Gianlorenzo Bernini's colonnade for St. Peter's Basilica—to the twentieth century—for the 1930s development of Mussolini's via della Conciliazione—they used period sources to map these faces and reveal that the practice of the frescoed façade was not just prolific along the main neighborhood streets but actually showcased how these projects clustered around the Borgo's piazza Scossacavalli.

Combined, these sources represent a scholarly trajectory of enduring interest in this aspect of Renaissance visual culture; at the same time, these accounts present numerous challenges. The first dilemma is the inconsistency that persists across each inventory. Mancini's and Celio's chronicles, for example, are vaguely written with passing references made to witnessed motifs but few deeper insights beyond. So general were their chronicles that scholars like Goffredo Grilli questioned whether they even merited consideration.¹⁷ While throwing these early narratives out altogether seems preemptive, it does help to explain why, thanks to this ambiguity, later scholars interpreted these accounts differently, resulting in divergent compilations that make it difficult to confidently synthesize the tradition's development. As one example: Mancini's brief chronicle references roughly eighty façades; meanwhile, Gnoli lists more than double that amount, and differences in totals only increase as additional accounts are cross-referenced. This leads to another complication: that of the reliability of the accounts provided. Vasari, for instance, has been known to misattribute certain projects, patrons, and locations; meanwhile, Mancini confused artists in his narrative. Giovanni Battista Franco, for instance, who worked under the pseudonym "Il Semolei," is dubbed "Il Samuele" in Mancini's text for no apparent reason.¹⁸ Given that subsequent writers relied on these period accounts, one can imagine how these errors persisted over history. Such is the case for another portmanteau penned by Mancini, who referred

15 Maria Errico, Stella Sandra Finozzi, and Irene Giglio. "Ricognizione e schedatura delle facciate affrescate e graffite a Roma nei secoli XV e XVI," *Bollettino D'arte* 6th ser., vol. 70, no. 33–34 (1985): 53–134.

16 Ebe Giacometti and Floriana Mauro, "Sulle case dipinte a Roma con particolare attenzione per le ornamentazioni a graffito e chiaroscuro del rione Borgo," *Geoarcheologia* 1 (1992): 101–49.

17 Goffredo Grilli, "Le pitture a graffito e chiaroscuro di Polidoro e Maturino sulla facciate delle case di Roma," *Rassegna d'Arte* 7 (1905): 97–102.

18 Mancini, *Viaggio di Roma*, 1:281; 2:no.1475. Fabrizio Biferali and Massimo Firpo have questioned where Mancini's moniker for Franco was derived, noting that Francesco Sansovino also recorded it as "Semolelli." For more, see: Francesco Sansovino, *Delle cose notabili che sono in Venetia* (Venice: Comin da Trino, 1561), 18r; Fabrizio Biferali and Massimo Firpo, *Battista Franco, pittore veneziano nella cultura artistica e nella vita religiosa del Cinquecento* (Edizione Normale, 2007), 19.

to a now-lost façade along what was via Borgo Sant'Angelo as being decorated by "Perino da Caravaggio," an erroneous moniker that reappeared in later itineraries.¹⁹

Even more disheartening is that, while Gnoli and Pericoli Ridolfini developed more extensive accounts of these façades, their inventories frequently fell victim to the same ambiguities of Mancini and Celio's texts. As one example: Gnoli identified two frescoed façades on vicolo del Gallo that both bore evidence of a papal *stemma*.²⁰ Gnoli is the only scholar to note two façades on this street—Mancini acknowledges one, but no period account records a second—and he offered no points to differentiate between the two frescoed faces.²¹ Gnoli even audaciously included in his chronicle façades like those of the palazzo Antonelli (via di Monserrato, 34), where he presumed the past presence of a frescoed design without relaying any supporting evidence.²² Furthermore, the reliance on an inventory-like listing in Gnoli's and Pericoli Ridolfini's publications—a format also employed in Hirschfeld's earlier dissertation—thereby missed the opportunity to consider the wholistic scholarly implications of this network of painted conversations across the city. This omission was particularly disappointing in Pericoli Ridolfini's catalog since it was the only publication beyond Maccari's to include imagery yet failed to acknowledge how these visualized vignettes conversed in the tradition's larger dialogue. Thus, the value of these various accounts is problematized since disentangling the total number of façades, their authors, and their locations is strikingly difficult.

Frustratingly, only some of these discrepancies can be rectified here, since mere fragments of these frescoes remain. To that end, though, one can note the various scholarly interventions that have insightfully illuminated some of these remnants. In terms of preparatory drawings, Lanfranco Ravelli's comprehensive monograph, *Polidoro Caldara da Caravaggio: studio e catalogo* (1978), includes a substantive compendium of the artist's drawings associated with many of the documented frescoed façades on which the Lombard artist worked.²³ Missing, though, is a

19 For instance, it appears in: Girolamo Amati, "Di Giulio Mancini, e del suo tratta inedito sopra le pitture di Roma," in *Il Buonarroti: Scritti sopra le arti e le lettere*, vol. 1, ed. Benvenuto Gasparoni and Enrico Narducci (Rome, 1867), 1–8 (published under Amati's penname "Momo"). Similar errors appear in later publications. For instance, Giuseppe Vasi, in his *Itinerario istruttivo ... Roma* (1777), refers to "Maturino da Caravaggio." For more, see: Vasi, *Itinerario istruttivo*, 3:483. This portmanteau also reappeared in later scholarship, with Luigi Cállari again attributing the façade work at the palazzo Ricci to "Polidoro e Maturino da Caravaggio." For more, see: Luigi Cállari, *I palazzi di Roma e le case di pregio storico e artistico* (Società editrice Dante Alighieri, 1907), 104.

20 Gnoli, *Facciate graffite e dipinte in Roma*, 37.

21 For Mancini's brief mention of the home at vicolo del Gallo, 20, see: Mancini, *Viaggio di Roma*, 1:288; 2:no. 1639.

22 Gnoli, *Facciate graffite e dipinte in Roma*, 43.

23 Lanfranco Ravelli, *Polidoro Caldara da Caravaggio: Studio e catalogo*, 2 vols. (Edizione "Monumenta Bergonmensia," 1978).

synthesis of these works as an interconnected phase of the artist's career or as a visual conversation across city streets. Additionally, the previously mentioned article by Errico and colleagues (1985) offers a somewhat detailed study of roughly thirty façades that mapped locations and sought to offer more discussion of the context of each façade's creation. Their scope, though, is also relatively narrow and misses opportunities to think more broadly about the impact of this visual tradition.

Perhaps the strongest contributions in recent decades have been those by scholars who examined individual façades in incisive detail and linked once-lost sketches to further interpret the displayed visual programs. Georgia Clarke's "Paul III and the Façade of the Casa Crivelli in Rome" (1989), for instance, dives into its complex iconography and implications for the elaborate home along via dei Banchi Vecchi.²⁴ Her subsequent book chapter, "History, Politics, and Art in Palace Façades in Early Sixteenth-Century Rome," offered a significant synthesis of several key façades in Rome to demonstrate how these edifices contributed to constructing social identities.²⁵ More recently, Francesca Romana Stabile and Giovanna Spadafora performed a thorough technical analysis of the dwelling on vicolo del Governo Vecchio, 52, merging historical documents with photogrammetric study to "restore" its design as if to witness it once again from a Renaissance perspective.²⁶ Arianna Farina continued this conversation in her 2021 article, "Dialoghi novecenteschi sull'arte del passato: La riscoperta della Roma picta," where she positioned a selection of these façades as integral contributors to a rapidly evolving urban landscape.²⁷ Similarly, Costanza Barbieri's study of the iconography of the palazzo Milesi added new depth of understanding to this face's incorporated motifs and messages.²⁸ These individual interventions model what can be gained in a new investigation that examines the larger exchanges and dialogues these façades might have encouraged.

24 Georgia Clarke, "Paul III and the Façade of the Casa Crivelli in Rome," *Renaissance Studies* 3, no. 3 (September 1989): 252–66. Clarke laments at the outset of her article that "the painted and stuccoed decorated façades of palazzi in Rome have not received their due in terms either of conservation or art-historical and architectural discussion." Clarke, "Paul III," 252.

25 Georgia Clarke, "History, Politics, and Art in Palace Façades in Early Sixteenth-Century Rome," in *Some Degree of Happiness: Studi di storia dell'architettura in onore di Howard Burns*, ed. Maria Beltramini and Caroline Elam (Edizioni della Normale, 2010), 233–358.

26 Francesca Romana Stabile and Giovanna Spadafora, "Rivestimenti graffiti a Roma nel XVI secolo: L'esempio della casa in vicolo del Governo Vecchio, 52," *Disegno per il restauro: Oltre il rilievo* 8, no. 14 (January 2015): 1–16.

27 Arianna Farina, "Dialoghi novecenteschi sull'arte del passato: La riscoperta della Roma picta," *Studi e Ricerche* 5 (2021): 40–53; Arianna Farina, "Confrontarsi con l'assenza: Nuove prospettive di ricerca e di visualizzazione di un dimenticato museo a cielo aperto della Roma Rinascimento," *Magazén* 3, no. 1 (June 2022): 91–113.

28 Costanza Barbieri, "The Rediscovered Iconography of Palazzo Milesi's Façade by Polidoro da Caravaggio, Plutarch's Parallel Lives, and a New Drawing," in *Space, Image, and Reform in Early Modern Art: The Influence of Marcia Hall*, ed. Arthur J. DiFuria and Ian Verstegen (De Gruyter, 2021), 125–44.

New Interventions

Building on these foundations, this book expands and enhances the long-overdue scholarly documentation of these façades. Following a rigorous assessment of past inventories and cross-referencing with contemporary observations, it offers a new, more accessible tabulation of the roughly 200 decorated façades documented in the central *rioni* of Renaissance Rome (fig. 3 and appendix). In this novel accounting, it is revealed that, of these sites, thirty-one survive to the present day in varying states of preservation/conservation. This aspect alone is important as this inventory expands significantly from the last to be developed by Errico et al. (1985). Their report documented thirty-six frescoed sites; however, their summation included several courtyard frescoes, façades outside the city center, and, sadly, one centrally located frescoed façade on the via Giulia, 82, that has since been obliterated. Subtracting this lost example as well as these outliers left a total of twenty-two; this inventory, then, expands the tally for surviving frescoes within the *centro storico* by 40 percent.²⁹ Add to these surviving façades an additional nine that are almost completely documented via a compendium of prints and drawings, and the survey size almost doubles from Errico's analysis. Thus, to this author's knowledge, this marks the first publication to identify and assess with depth this volume of façades in Rome's *centro*.³⁰

Using this first-of-its-kind inventory as a springboard, this book also aims to advance the conversation by providing new insights into the field in several ways. First, it uses this compilation of well-documented façades within the *centro*

29 Specifically, the survey of Errico et al., "Ricognizione e schedatura" drew its sample set from nine *rioni* as well as three *quartieri* outside of the Aurelian Walls; the authors also included properties—like the casa Burcardo, owned by Johannes Burckardt on via del Sudario, and the villa Chigi (Farnesina) where frescoed façades were not public-facing. This study instead focuses on examples from six central *rioni*—primarily those of Ponte, Parione, and Regola—that bear (or once bore) streetside frescoes. For a synthesis of Burckardt's dwelling, see: Tobias Daniels, "Giovanni Burckardo e l'immagine dei curiali tedeschi a Roma nel primo Rinascimento." *Archivio della Società Romana di Storia Patria* 136 (2013): 37–59.

30 Beyond these forty relatively well-documented façades, this new inventory also charts thirty more that are illustrated at least partially, and just over 110 additional façades are described in some means. Of that number, twenty-five façades are described in medium alone (e.g., chiaroscuro or sgraffito); however, the fact that some level of description exists for 180 of the 205 currently identified frescoes is promising. The remaining façades of that 205 total are merely noted—for example, Vasari's passing comment that Polidoro and Maturino "fecero ancora sopra Farnese un'altra facciata de Cepperelli." Vasari, *Le vite*, 3: 199. One must also acknowledge that past inventories offer some ambiguous locations. As one example: Mancini mentions a façade "in Parione per andare a Pasquino, incontro a Mignanelli." Mancini, *Viaggio di Roma*, 1:312. This provides a tentative location since the Siense Mignanelli family had a home (today the palazzo Mignanelli Fonseca) not far from the piazza Pasquino, and thus it is included as an approximate location. That said, there is no specific location provided, so it is placed on the map with ample circumspection. Properties without even an approximate street location have been omitted from the list.

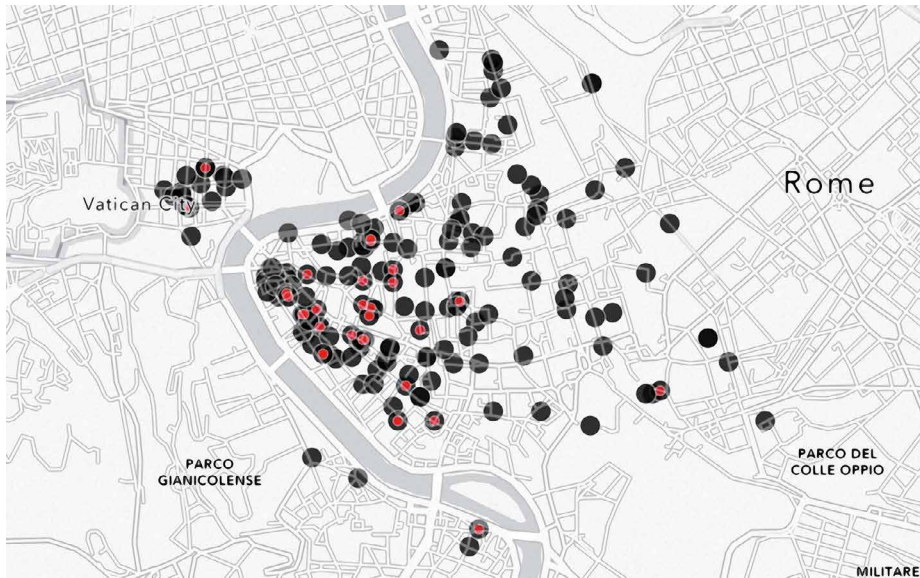


Fig. 3: Map of the roughly 200 documented decorated façades dated to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries across the center of Rome, with red overlay dots indicating surviving frescoes (author's illustration/ArcGIS).

storico—preserved either in situ or in visual documentation—as a primer for exploring the visual language of these frescoes. The result is the proposal for a novel categorization of these façades into four main phases of stylistic development. As will be discussed, a closer reading of these decorative programs rendered in chiaroscuro and sgraffito reveals an evolution in compositional complexity that extended or amplified the interplay between art, ornament, and architecture; however, past central scholarly assessments tended to generalize the practice. Vasari, for example, noted elements of the execution of these painted faces but did not venture into categorizing their motifs or themes, nor did any chronicler who followed from Mancini to Pericoli Ridolfini. Errico's study broke new ground in that it offered a depth of material analysis in attempting to establish the general similarities in design; however, there too the opportunity to consider the transformation of these façade motifs was overlooked.³¹ Admittedly, the lack of dating for many of these façades perhaps proved too vexing for a chronological categorization to be proposed.

That said, a purely stylistic disentangling can still be pursued. Such is proven by the work of other scholars who have posited the existence of such periods by attending more carefully to the nuances of the frescoed façade's visual development. For example, in her 1989 article on the casa Crivelli, Georgia Clarke suggested two categories of Roman façade decoration: “the first was of geometric patterning and

31 For more, see: Errico et al., “Ricognizione e schedatura,” 57–59.

ornamentation with elements such as garlands, discarded Roman armour and friezes of Classical inspiration. The second was the inclusion, on a small or large scale, of human figures and narrative scenes.³² Since Clarke's division, others have worked to further delineate between fresco motifs. In her investigation of Florentine façades, Payne demarcates three phases: the first, that spans the late fourteenth to mid-fifteenth century, is identifiable by façades featuring "borders and infill with imitation ashlar stone that evolves gradually into more complex figural bands for the borders"; the second, from the mid-fifteenth century into the early sixteenth century, can be defined as "a phase of *grotteschi*, but also of a balance between pattern and geometrical arrangements"; and finally, the third phase, "that of large-scale *grotteschi* that cover the entire field with figural forms."³³

Reformulating Payne's Tuscan trajectory for Rome, the argument made here is the presence of four main styles of frescoed façade design. This categorization proposed herein might lead one to recall August Mau's nineteenth-century analysis of ancient Roman wall painting that established four main styles that transitioned from streamlined faux architectural revetments of the first "Incrustation" style to the fantastic, *trompe l'oeil* transformations of the fourth "Intricate" style.³⁴ On a cursory level, this basis in Mau's stylistic systematization is fitting given the prevalence of *all'antica* quotations occurring throughout Renaissance Rome, specifically these frescoed façades. This is not to suggest that the makers of these façades had identified and thus were working to replicate these styles; Mau's study of Pompeiian wall painting would have accessed sources much more extensive than, for example, the Domus Aurea that proved one of the sixteenth-century Roman artist's main sourcebooks of ancient painting. The distinctions, however, that Mau assigned each style do somewhat parallel the different approaches to frescoed façades witnessed across Renaissance Rome, particularly in the way the space of the façade is divided. Thus, using his premise as a loose framework, a new set of styles can be outlined that apply specifically to the Renaissance Roman frescoed façade.

The first-style frescoed façade, here named the "Structural" style, demonstrates fictive geometries—including ashlars and frieze courses of conservative *grotteschi* (grotesques). This first Renaissance style is not that dissimilar from Mau's "Incrustation" style as it similarly emphasized the element of faux revetments. In the second style, or "Framed" style, Renaissance Roman frescoed façade, for example, expands

32 Clarke, "Paul III," 253.

33 Alina Payne, "Renaissance *Sgraffito* Façades and the Circulation of Objects in the Mediterranean," in *Synergies in Visual Culture*, ed. Gerhard Wolf, Manuela De Giorgi, Annette Hoffmann, and Nicola Suthor (Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2013), 234.

34 For more on Mau's four styles, see: August Mau, *Geschichte der decorativen Wandmalerei in Pompeji* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1882).

its visual repertoire to include a very small number of narrative vignettes such as enlarged familial *stemme* or fictive *inquadrature* that broke beyond the frieze course yet that were consistently framed neatly within the façade's larger compositional planes. This also loosely parallels Mau's second style, the "Architectural Style," particularly in the attention upheld throughout these façades to the architectural underpinnings of the building's face via symmetrical placement and neat framing. With the third, or "Illusory," style, Renaissance designs began to push more directly on the bounds of the architectural surface. More of the façade is given over to narrative and, akin to the third, "Ornamental Style" of ancient Roman wall painting, illusionistic surfaces are enhanced using perspective and occasional polychrome accents. Finally, in the fourth, or "Theatrical," style Renaissance Roman frescoed façades blend these elements together to give the entire façade to illusionistic and often colorful display. In these fourth-style faces, narrative vignettes are no longer beholden to the architectural confines of the façade as if bordering on the realm of scenography, and polychrome additions achieve new heights to amplify visual impact. Somewhat like Mau's "Intricate Style" found in ancient Rome, these fourth-style Renaissance façades can also blend elements from the earlier styles together, all while being freed from their architectural substrate. This proposed progression of four styles, from fictive geometries resembling fortified architectural revetments to fully illusory theatrics, better underscores the diversity of representational modes seen across this visual tradition as it pushed the boundaries of the architectural surface to even greater extremes.

Second, this book frames these styles while positioning each as a springboard for exploring the role of these frescoed façades in the larger landscape of Renaissance Roman visual culture. First, it revisits the place of the frescoed façade in the rising discourse of architectural theory that was steeped in a reinvestigation of ancient form and introduced a new vernacular of design. This *all'antica* revival intersected with trends in self-fashioning such that one's domestic edifice became central to their constructed public persona. The practice of the decorated façade thus had to define itself within this intersection of past and present, raising important questions about how these embellishments conversed with architectural tenets. Second, it also uses remaining documentation to question the potential connections between makers, motifs, and meanings behind these decorations that literally built up(on) the presence of many homes along Rome's bustling streets. In sum, it enlivens the practice by better situating it within the city, at the time driven by *renovatio* and its paradoxical yet pervasive passion for all things *all'antica*; the makers, whose previously established modes of visual exchange might have cultivated the façade as a space for further collaboration and idea exchange; and the conversations, those initiated by these faces in the process of self-fashioning within the decorous delimitations of one's street presence.

Third, this book expands examination of the artists who conjured these fascinating façades. While Baldassare Peruzzi and Polidoro da Caravaggio or their later colleagues Taddeo and Federico Zuccaro are often invoked in conversations of this visual tradition, a synthesis of these past chronicles reveals a web of nearly fifty artists involved in frescoed façade creation. In light of the previously mentioned inconsistencies within these chronicles, however, numerous artists cited as creators or collaborators in these façade projects are to be questioned. Accordingly, while this extended artist list is reflected in the appendix, this book also distills the list to the ten artists to whom these façades are most often attributed and interrogates them within the context of artistic exchange to hopefully shed new light on artists whose contributions to these faces have previously been overlooked. This close reading of the artists at work additionally allows for a nuanced discussion of the cultivation of an *all'antica* visual dialect within these frescoed programs that provided another blurring of temporal bounds.

(Re)Taking Stock: A Modern *Percorso*

Despite their problems, the writings of period chroniclers like Mancini and Celio are laudable in that they offer a window into the role they played along Rome's streets. To that end, this book pays homage to those foundational itineraries to some extent in developing its own *percorso* through Renaissance Rome that seeks to illuminate the phases of frescoed façade design interpolated within a journey through the contextual components that helped fuel its growth. Specifically, each of the first four chapters investigates one of the newly defined categories for Renaissance Roman façade frescoes—Structural (first style), Framed (second style), Illusory (third style), and Theatrical (fourth style), respectively—as an avenue to link these phases with relevant Renaissance ideologies and conversations. While the frescoed façade could have risen to prominence thanks to any one of these singular elements, they converge here to showcase how their confluence contributed to a dynamic historical moment that served as an ideal incubator for fresco and sgraffito decorations.

The first chapter, “Foundations: First Style (Structural),” forms a basis for the frescoed façade tradition by framing Rome as an urban atmosphere overwhelmed by the fifteenth century with renovation and transformation owed to a series of popes who pursued a forward-looking Rome emerging from the foundations of its antique past. This environment fueled a pervasive slippage of time as ancient objects engaged in early modern conversations as both contributors to the construction of individuals' identities and signifiers of implied power and status of one's dwelling location among Rome's streets. Accordingly, this chapter frames some

of the considerations essential to the placement of one's dwelling as well as the modes of connecting to an antique past using spolia, antiquities collections, or other symbolic references, links made even more crucial given the concurrent confrontation between historically Roman families and new, foreign transplants to the city also seeking to define their public "Roman" image. At the same time, it positions the role of fresco decorations within these dwellings as they move from private to public space and embrace the visual language of fictive ashlar and *all'antica* friezes.

The second chapter, "Theoretical Implications: Second Style (Framed)," situates the evolution of frescoed façades from mere faux revetments to more architecturally inspired spatial systematization by diving deeper into the ideological implications of dressing one's dwelling with such fresco ornament. It returns to the foundational texts of architectural theory to explore how ornamentation played a role in period design to further probe the life of this recombined visual language within the architectural framework on which it is rendered. It also frames the role of the architect, a nebulous title that afforded those who pursued it remarkable facility to cross disciplinary bounds and thus fostered experimentation with such façade frescoes.

The third chapter, "Increasing Innovation: Third Style (Illusory)," examines the push of the frescoed face further into the fantastical realm, pairing examples of increasingly elaborate façades that demonstrate advanced perspectival play to more extensively probe the transformative power of such treatments. This play of surface manifests in powerful visual illusions of perspective to convey a protruding pilaster or sculpture nested in a niche, but it also implicates other artistic media in the process. The intermediality conjured by this adept ornamentation further underscores the visual impact that these faces would have.

Building on that intermedial intensity, the fourth chapter, "Total Translation: Fourth Style (Theatrical)," frames the final phase of frescoed façades as increasingly defiant of the fixed nature of its architectural substrate in their playful color and compositional pastiches. These conversations are as varied as the frescoes themselves; thus, explored in tandem will be the nature of artistic exchange among makers. Thanks to these relationships that encouraged a shared visual language, the contributing artists will be positioned as core to the emergence of a new *all'antica* dialect expressed in these faces.

Having framed these four styles, the fifth chapter, "Contextual Conversations" steps back to consider the larger dialogue of the visual motifs on some of the central nexuses of frescoed façades in Rome, which might have engaged each other by juxtaposing the specific narratives that have been identified in their visual programs. In addition to accounting for repeated motifs, the goal in this chapter is to better invest the analysis of these elaborate faces with the importance of

place. The concluding chapter, “Beyond Renaissance Rome,” closes the study by considering Rome’s role in the larger European frescoed façade dialogue with a brief synthesis of the tradition’s geographical expansion elsewhere in the Italian peninsula and on the European continent. While not comprehensive in its scope in assessing the tradition as it manifests in these cities, the hope is to nod to a wider understanding of the artistic decisions being made among Roman frescoed façade designs, how they intersect with (and diverge from) Northern European centers, and how they proved fodder for artistic emulation in later generations. By closing with an updated appendix of documented façades, this book simultaneously recalls the complicated legacy of this field of visual culture. Today, only some of these façades are still detectable; the modernization of the city, the deleterious effects of pollution, and the overall lack of conservation for these ethereal faces have resulted in their slow demise. Accordingly, this closing section will consider the shifting cultural and political landscapes that have influenced this degradation to frame some hope for the enduring preservation and study of these magnificently frescoed and sgraffitoed faces. At the same time, this final portion of the book will question the intention of these images as either destined for posterity or purely transitory.

Caveats

There are limitations to every study, so while this book hopes to advance from past efforts to explore the frescoed façade tradition in a more comprehensive manner, it does so with careful framing. First, while it offers a novel stylistic categorization of these façades, it does so unbound by chronology. This is in large part owed to the challenge of dating: though some dates for these frescoes are offered in the literature, the majority lack such a timestamp. Given this, while one can be confident that the frescoed façades noted across sixteenth and seventeenth-century inventories were of the period, less assured is the exact date and patron for many of these faces. Moreover, the equally guaranteed restoration of these frescoes over the past five hundred years requires one to acknowledge that what exists today may or may not align exactly with its original presentation.

To better weed through these surviving examples, then, this book resultingly confines the array of decorated façades discussed. In addition to limiting selections to those within the historic center, the following also sidesteps discussion of loggia and courtyard façade frescoes. The frescoes from the casino del Bufalo originally sited near the Aqua Virgo aqueduct and most often credited to Polidoro are some of the best preserved today (several portions survive in the collection of the Museo di Roma—palazzo Braschi), and recent restoration work at the villa built for Agostini Chigi along the Tiber (today the Villa Farnesina) resulted in the reemergence of some

of these façade figures; regardless, they are left out because they defied the central premise of this book to explore the street-facing façade frescoes and their role in identity construction. The same can be said of the so-called “casa del Curato” (via Francesco Jacovacci, 25) that, while street-facing today was most likely a private casino within the larger complex designed for Pope Julius III (1550–1555) in the latter half of the sixteenth century.³⁵ As a counterpoint, the casina Bessarione near the porta San Sebastiano featured interior frescoed courtyards but also carried the visual conversation to the exterior with the street-side façade covered in a frescoed quotation of *opus isodomum* (fig. 6). This latter example is thus invoked in the following pages—albeit briefly, as it admittedly falls outside of the proposed rioni on which this book focuses—because it incorporated a public-facing frescoed face relevant to the analysis herein.

To further refine focus, also excluded are those façades decorated predominantly with elements beyond fresco. As a case in point: the previously mentioned casa Crivelli is a splendid sixteenth-century decorated façade; its primary medium, however, is stucco, which conjured a quite convincing visual scheme awash with Classical references. The stucchetti tradition bears parallels to that of sgraffito in that it similarly comprised a subtractive process of incising lines into a plaster surface, and some of Rome’s chief practitioners of stucchetti—namely, Giovanni da Udine—were also connected with the circle of artists most implicated in the creation of frescoed façades. Moreover, façades like that of the Crivelli, built on similar visual themes as its frescoed counterparts, contributed to the vitality of the façade’s street-side transformation. Nevertheless, rather than spreading a technical accounting too thin and risking a far too general assessment of such stucchetti, these examples are deliberately set apart from those faces on which this book aims to focus. Also set aside are properties decorated with dubious location descriptions. For example, Pericoli Ridolfini includes in her tally a façade on the piazza di Pietra. She noted that she included it because Mancini documented it as another lost work by Polidoro; however, she also admits that Mancini is not clear if this design appeared on the façade or the building interior.³⁶ For the sake of clarity, only those properties whose frescoed locations can be more confidently determined have been included in the discussion.

Moreover, analysis spotlights those façades that invoke *all’antica* aspects as opposed to decorations solely of a religious nature. Biblical figures and narratives are discussed when they are incorporated into larger visual programs, but left aside

35 For more, see: Dante Biolchi, “La casa del Curato,” *Capitolium: Rassegna del comune di Roma* 6 (June 1957): 21–23. Portions of this façade are also illustrated in Maccari and Iannoni, *Graffiti e chiaroscuri*, table 32.

36 Pericoli Ridolfini, *Le case romane*, 24; Mancini, *Viaggio di Roma*, 1:283; 2:no. 1523.



Fig. 4: *Works of Sixtus V: Antoninus Column*, ca. 1590; fresco; vault of the Sistine Library. Getty Images/Di Agostini Picture Library. A close look to the right of the triumphal column reveals the Arco dei Pazzarelli, reported by Mancini as being frescoed by Taddeo and Federico Zuccaro across the entablature over the arch (*Viaggio di Roma*, 1:283, 2:n. 1521). The subjects were primarily religious, however, most likely to complement the adjacent Santa Maria della Pietà.

in the forthcoming analysis is a careful reading of the numerous street *madonnelle*, or street shrines, that still today can be seen across Rome. This tradition is of course linked with that of the frescoed façade and, in fact, these shrines may represent some of the city's earliest façade frescoes. Furthermore, their makers appear in the list of artists examined here. Perino del Vaga's *Coronation of the Virgin*, for instance, which serves as the centerpiece for the shrine known as the *Imago Pontis* (ca. 1532) on via dei Coronari, could easily be grouped into our discussion. The same goes for Taddeo and Federico Zuccaro's frieze of frescoed figures that appeared on the Arco dei Pazzarelli adjacent to the Church of Santa Maria della Pietà on piazza Colonna. That this work was immortalized in a frescoed lunette in Pope Sixtus V's late sixteenth-century Vatican library (fig. 4)—to this author's knowledge the only documented fresco depicting a frescoed façade—implies the importance that these façades might have held in period popular opinion.³⁷

Regardless, such examples are excluded from this analysis as the motivations for their making arguably diverge from those frescoed façades discussed here.

³⁷ Mancini referenced this fresco and attributed it to Taddeo and Federico Zuccaro. Mancini, *Viaggio di Roma*, 1:283; 2:no. 1521.

While these *madonelle* and other religious narratives can also serve to situate the patron, they use a visual vocabulary independent of the *all'antica* lexicon more closely tied to the building of one's social identity. To be sure, Antonio da Sangallo's Classical temple front designed to encase Perino's fresco for the *Imago Pontis* offers a taste of *all'antica* aesthetics, however, for many of these shrines these antique connections are far more muted. This is not to imply that all of the Renaissance in Rome was tied to the Classical world; however, for the sake of a focused analysis of the frescoed façade tradition, such *all'antica* emphasis will be paramount for the examples scrutinized in the following pages. These omitted elements admittedly leave out parts of the larger story of fresco applications in the Eternal City, but in so doing make room for an incisive look into the specific practice of the frescoed façade along Rome's Renaissance streets.

Facing Time

Driving this book is the desire more generally to capture what remains of a vanishing artistic tradition. Concerns over the disappearance of these decorations were raised by both Gnoli and Pericoli Ridolfini, whose common refrain in many of their entries is that the façades they discuss no longer exist, either weathered away by time or consumed by demolition or whitewash. The palazzo Battiferro, for example, which stood along the via Borgo Nuovo and was reportedly decorated with scenes of chiaroscuro mythology, was leveled; also erased were the rumored frescoes on the palazzo Sora when the previously mentioned development of the Corso Vittorio Emanuele II resulted in the reconstruction of the palazzo's façade. Gnoli and Pericoli Ridolfini were not the first to express fear over these regrettable losses. Filippo Clementi bemoaned the same in his 1942 account of surviving Roman decorated façades: "It is truly an irreparable disgrace that the offences of time and man have destroyed this magnificent cultural patrimony such that today all that remains are a few relics, more or less deformed by miserable restoration or reduced to a pitiful state."³⁸ The erosion of these designs was not the only source of their loss; some were also deliberately concealed from view. Clementi's lament also recalls that, during a wave of revulsion toward such frescoes in the second half of the nineteenth century, some of these decorations, including those on the façades of the palazzo Baldassini on via dei Coppelle as well as several surrounding San Giovanni dei Fiorentini at the head of via Giulia, were subsumed by whitewashing. Still others were lost amid well-intentioned yet decidedly inaccurate restorations

38 Filippo Clementi, "I graffiti nella ornamentazione edilizia di Roma nel Rinascimento," *Capitolium: Rassegna mensile del governatorato* 2 (February 1942): 48.

as the pendulum of popular opinion swung back and encouraged the preservation of these façades. A prime example is the casa Sander (via Santa Maria dell'Anima, 65), where a thorough revision of the façade altered major aspects and introduced anachronistic iconography. Thus, while some of this visual legacy is handed down to our modern day, one must be circumspect in our disentanglement of Renaissance versus recent additions.

Just as these façades degrade, so too does the opportunity to learn from the artists involved in their creation. Many of the artistic practitioners mentioned as part of the larger narrative of the decorated façade discussed in the forthcoming pages have fallen into obscurity; for those who have achieved some acclaim, their specific contributions to the field of the decorated façade have often been minimized. Thus, this book offers a new means to revisit these protagonists and build new or refreshed links between their artistic network and output. In providing a broad reassessment of the frescoed façade tradition in sixteenth-century Rome, as well as documenting and mapping the few surviving examples and fragments that line Rome's modern streets today, this book will also dive into the historical accounts to reconstruct the landscape of these painted faces of the city. These pursuits aim to inspire contemporary scholars in the fields of both art and architectural history, those invested in modes of workshop exchange, or still others invested in the study of self-fashioning through the lens of one's dwelling. More generally, though, this book aims to stimulate interest in an aspect of visual culture that still whispers to us—however faintly—across Rome today.