

## Acknowledgments

A book brings together countless experiences that have shaped it, but these experiences are usually not limited to what ultimately appears in the book. My efforts to see the *tavolette* of the Archconfraternity of San Giovanni Decollato, the little painted panels shown to condemned people at the time of their execution, was one such unforeseen opportunity and one for which I could fill an entire page of acknowledgments. For months I attempted to get access to the complex of San Giovanni Decollato (closed and left partly without identifiable administration). I talked to all the neighbors, including the staff of the attached elegant hotel, 47, that is the source of the confraternity's charity funds; I got to know the South American nuns temporarily housed in the church's vacant living quarters, learned about their precarious life in Rome, and even considered joining them; I attended various civic government meetings that dealt with the intervention of lay charities in urban poverty; and I searched for information at the local bar over countless coffees. Finally, someone in the bar gave me a little piece of paper with a phone number and I reached an unnamed person in the Office of Lay Charities who told me that the confraternity had arranged a date for its annual meeting and might let me into the room I needed to see. Those attending the meeting didn't know why I was there, didn't know about the abject little paintings in a cabinet in the far corner of their meeting room, and in any case could not find the keys. They were amazed to learn what their early modern predecessors did with the images, and they were intrigued when I showed them how to hold one of the *tavolette* up to someone's face by the handle so I could photograph it. The current problems of the institution and its neglected images (both prestigious frescoes and the overlooked *tavolette*) cannot be detached from the social life and struggles of the neighborhood or from the complicated political, cultural, and religious networks of the city at large. The insights I gained went far beyond what is possible with the consultation of books and documents.

Yet the library is a wonderful place, as many of us were reminded when the British Library reopened after many months of working only from the screen. I thank the staff of the British Library for understanding what it meant to be back among the books and in the company of others. I have been very lucky to have around me the generous and stimulating colleagues and students in the History of Art Department at University College London. I don't take this for granted, and I especially thank Richard Taws, Diana Dethloff, Alison Wright, Fred Schwartz, Allie Stielau, Natasha Eaton, Tamar Garb, Eleanor Day, and Bob Mills; I am indebted to the various and diverse communities of early modern scholars and students, including Michael Gaudio, Angela Vanhaelen, Todd Olson, Lyle Massey, Evelyn Lincoln, David Kim, Anne Dunlop, Patricia Reilly, Mark McDonald, and Alina Payne, for they retain a critical and social commitment to our endeavors and remind me that what we do matters,

even if so much in the academic world has become rather discouraging. I thank all of my dear friends in Rome, especially the feisty members of Rickey's Salon, my friends and neighbors in Testaccio, Cavaliere Portia Prebys for the gift of Ferrara and the help gaining access to church officials, and especially Carolyn Valone (whose presence for me will always be in Rome) for her sound guidance on book and life matters. And I thank my family in Canada, my brilliant movie and theater chat groups, my friends for endless conversations over online teas and cocktails, and the constant exchange of witty videos and images by all as I struggled to pull the book together during this strange past year. I cannot name everyone to whom I am indebted, but I cannot fail to mention Mechthild Fend, Maria Loh, Joanna Woodall, Sarah Monks, Bronwen Wilson, Stephanie Schwartz, Marian Campbell, Dian Kriz, and Briony Fer.

# INTRODUCTION

*Violence and the Image in Transition*