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Dissertation

**THE HISTORICAL PROCESSION OF
ANDREA MANTEGNA'S *TRIUMPHS OF CAESAR*:
FROM MANTUA TO HAMPTON COURT**

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation centers on Andrea Mantegna's masterful series of nine canvases, the *Triumphs of Caesar*, painted for the Gonzaga family of Mantua in the late Quattrocento. The project considers the history of the series, including the circumstances of its commission, the use of the *Triumphs* within the court culture of Mantua, and the recontextualization of the series in England after its sale to King Charles I in 1630. I argue that the series was intended to serve as a form of permanent palatial decoration, and that only through a series of unforeseen events was the *Triumphs* ultimately used as a backdrop for theatrical performances. At Hampton Court Palace, outside of London, the *Triumphs* took on a new role, one which changed over the centuries, dependent upon the occupant of the palace.

The first chapter explores the iconography of the *Triumphs of Caesar* and addresses Mantegna's possible visual and literary sources. I situate the series within the context of Renaissance triumphal imagery and argue that the strictly classical nature of Mantegna's *Triumphs* sets it apart from other fifteenth-century depictions. The second chapter turns to the patronage of the series. Though the majority of scholars believe either Lodovico II or Francesco II Gonzaga to have been the patron, I suggest instead that it was Federico I Gonzaga who commissioned the series from Mantegna. I propose that Federico intended to display the *Triumphs* in the modern palace he was constructing, the Domus Nova, where the series would impress upon visitors both the military might and cultural attainments of the Gonzaga. After Federico's sudden death, however, his son Francesco inherited the series, and it was only then that the lightweight canvases were put to use as backdrops for theater and other ephemeral events, a topic addressed in chapter three. The fourth and final chapter turns to England and the role of the *Triumphs* at Hampton Court Palace, the home of the series for the past four centuries. I argue that the *Triumphs of Caesar* functioned differently for each occupant of the palace in turn, serving as political, cultural, or decorative instruments.