



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Pietro da Cortona, o della pittura barocca by Giuliano Briganti

Review by: Walter Friedlaender

Source: *Art Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Autumn, 1964), pp. 94+96

Published by: College Art Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/774768>

Accessed: 19-07-2017 14:44 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at

<http://about.jstor.org/terms>



College Art Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Art Journal*

command of it to follow Focillon's subtle and intense style. It is also helpful to have the additions and corrections provided by M. Bony's notes and bibliographies. The French edition was essentially a war-time product and shows it in the quality of materials and printing; the new edition is much more attractive and gains materially through superior illustrations more effectively keyed to the text.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for having and using Focillon's work is to compensate for what might be called the "novelty factor" in modern scholarship. An idea or theory does not become automatically invalid just because it has been explored and published. The extension of learning involves not only accumulation of new data and fresh insights but also the progressive refinement of theories which have already been examined. Unfortunately, the cult of the unique, whatever its place in the story of contemporary art, has produced some "scholarly" works more notable for being different than for being sound. It is possible to argue that Focillon places too much emphasis on French art, on the influence of building structure on design, or on a cyclical theory of the evolution of styles. It does not follow that it is a virtue to produce a work which fails to give just consideration to these factors. Yet, some recent studies suggest an essentially negative plan best understood in terms of reaction against such works as Focillon's. With Focillon's study they provide a stimulating basis for argument, without the earlier work they become unbalanced and incomplete.

The Art of the West is one of the most brilliant and effective discussions of Mediaeval art produced a generation ago. Supplemented but not supplanted by more recent publications, it remains a basic study. Editor, translator, and publishers are to be congratulated on making this fine, new edition available.

HARRY H. HILBERRY
Trinity University

Giuliano Briganti

Pietro da Cortona, o della pittura barocca, 357, pp., 306 ill. (17 in color)
Firenze: Sansoni, 1962. 18,000 lire

Around 1624 in his *Considerazione sulla Pittura*, Giulio Mancini introduced two young painters then in Rome of whose future success he felt assured, praising Nicholas Poussin for his literary erudition and *poesia* and Pietro de Cortona for his invention, expression, and color. This prediction proved well founded for twenty-five years later in Paris Abraham Bosse proclaimed these same two by far the best among the many excellent painters of his day, although he recognized their fundamental difference. However, the great fame enjoyed by Pietro Berrettini da Cortona under the splendid pontificate of the Barberini Urban VIII and his successors—equal to that of Borromini and Bernini—was bitterly dis-

puted in the mid-eighteenth century by Milizia and Quatremère de Quincy and never returned to the fullness of seventeenth century acclaim. Although the prejudice against the "baroque" has long been rectified, Cortona's name has not been valued as much as those of his associates Bernini and Borromini. At the beginning of this century, art historians, although eager to disentangle the historical and aesthetic *mirabilia* of the re-evaluated "baroque," did not write the full story of this great innovator in Roman seicento art. The most scholarly attempts were those of Oskar Pollak, a former student of Dvorak, who published short notices based on research in the Vatican archives in the *Kunstchronik* of 1911-12, but Pollak's early death at the Battle of Isonzo prevented him from completing the great monograph which he had planned. In 1919, Hans Posse published a thorough and exceptionally perceptive article on the Barberini ceiling, but we have had to wait nearly a half-century for the appearance of a full-dress monograph. Such a work is the recent biography of Cortona by Giuliano Briganti.

This is a thoughtful and elaborate work based on many years of study. However Briganti treats completely only Cortona's painted works. He merely traces the drawings, though he gives many remarkable examples, as for instance those after the antique which Cortona studied in his youth with the same enthusiasm as Poussin. A complete edition of the Cortona drawings is planned by Walter Vitzthum. It is a pity that Briganti does not study the grandiose architectural works such as the facade of Sta. Maria della Pace and Berrettini's personal church of Ss. Martina e Luca. What the world calls "baroque" would be still more elucidated by an analysis of the architecture and of Cortona's exciting ornamental decorations.

Briganti has written a book in which the phenomenon of the "barocco" is almost more important than the biography and evolution of the art of Cortona himself. He identifies the period with Cortona and Cortona with the period, which he can well do on the strength of tradition. Since the middle of the eighteenth century, together with Bernini and Borromini, Cortona has almost been equated with the "baroque," that is with everything which is bizarre, extravagant, and from a rigorous, classicistic point of view, hateful. One has only to read with what scorn Milizia characterized Cortona as utterly subversive in his *Dizionario delle belle arti del disegno*:

He overturned in Italy all the ideas of art created by Borromini in architecture and in painting. He neglected every principle founded on reason, which until his time had been fundamental to artists. He limited himself to seducing the eyes of the vulgar, and this facility brought him applause and followers. His compositions consist of a bustle of figures without number and without sense. . . .

The wheel of appreciation has made a complete revolution. From the beginning of this century, the works of Bernini, Borromini, and Cortona have again been the center of scholarly interest. Probably initiated in the circle of the Viennese school, the discussion of what constitutes the "baroque" has been pur-

sued with unlimited ambition by a host of scholars. Thus Professor Briganti also feels the obligation to describe in detail the position of Pietro da Cortona as a phenomenon of the "baroque." The great length of his analysis of the "baroque" style, already printed in *Paragone* thirteen years ago and partially translated in the *Encyclopedia of World Art*, encumbers the text of his biography.

I am glad to see that Briganti limits the extent of the "baroque" to the historically mentioned regions and does not insert the period of the Carracci and Caravaggio which, as I have said long ago, should not be included under the title "baroque." The term "baroque," now so widely adopted in popular writings, certainly may be used loosely to characterize the art of the century of which it forms so prominent a part (*pars pro toto*). However when used in a scholarly sense, it should be limited to the circle of artists who are cited and condemned in Quatremère de Quincy's *Encyclopedia* and in Milizia's *Dictionary*.

In my opinion the clearest exposition of the difference in seventeenth century styles was given in the famous dispute of 1637 between Pietro da Cortona and Andrea Sacchi in the Accademia di San Luca, related by Missirini in the *Memorie dell'Accademia di San Luca*. Here Sacchi, the painter of the first great fresco in the Palazzo Barberini, the *Divine Wisdom*, defended his own method of simplicity, isolation, and subtle abstraction against his antagonist's exuberance; in opposition to the sublime sterility of Sacchi, Cortona, the painter of the second great fresco in the Palazzo Barberini, claimed the glory of plentitude, which later in his *Trattato*, as Briganti indicates, he likened to a flower garden in full bloom, citing the Michelangelo *Last Judgment* as a prototype. In other words, the two ceilings represent the antipodes of "classicism" and "baroque." Briganti's long and vivid characterization gives a full spectrum of this fundamental opposition which, developing from the beginning of the century, came to full expression in the thirties when Sacchi, Duquesnoy, and Poussin clearly separated themselves from the "baroque" Cortona and Bernini.

The term "classicistic" for the group opposed to the "baroque" can be defended, particularly in the case of Poussin, because there is an outspoken intention to emulate the classic antique more in spirit than in direct imitation. But, I hesitate to use the term as Briganti and other modern scholars do for the earlier phases of the development, as for instance for Domenichino in contrast to Lanfranco. There is no classicism in the sense of Poussin, or David in either Domenichino's early works at Grottaferrata or in the somewhat later Sta. Cecilia frescoes in San Luigi dei Francesi, despite his obvious interest in antique sculpture and spatial construction in the San Luigi frescoes. Such modern expressions as "mannerism," "baroque," "rococo," et cetera, originally coined in a pejorative sense, should now be used only with the greatest caution and always *cum grano sales*.

When one examines the numerous oil paintings of Pietro da Cortona, one would hesitate to bring them under the category of "baroque" in the sense of Milizia. It seems that only

the strictly illusionistic paintings with their close relation to architecture drew his wrath. These so strongly vilified decorative works belong to the greatest conquests in the whole history of art. They constitute something new in painting which, almost in the sense of Wagner, may be called a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The cupola of Sant' Andrea della Valle, has been compared by Bellori in his *Life of Lanfranco* to the new polyphonic music; one hears in Cortona's illusionistic works not the individual tones but the total harmony they form. A creation such as the *Apostheosis of Urban VIII*, Cortona's Barberini ceiling decoration, goes further in picturesque construction than the justly praised Farnese ceiling of Annibale Carracci, as Posse has shown so well.

Briganti of course treats fully the various illusionistic decorations in Rome and Florence, but he seems to be more interested in the connoisseurship of the multitudes of oil paintings, which he is the first to bring completely together. The landscapes (some were recently discovered by Briganti) done mostly in the thirties, are most interesting; although they have nothing in common with Poussin's almost contemporaneous works, these paintings should be compared with those of the leading landscapists of the period: Tassi, Domenichino, and the young Claude Lorrain. The historical and mythological inventions of Cortona have a great attraction because of their fresh color and masterful composition. However it is not by chance that they have not been greatly appreciated—especially outside Italy—because they lack the "baroque" volubility of Rubens on the one hand and the dramatic seriousness and narrative precision of the classicist Poussin on the other.

At his beginnings Poussin was greatly under Cortona's influence, as for example in the *Martyrdom of St. Erasmus* done for St. Peter's, but the later *Rape of the Sabines*, probably conceived as a challenge to the famous Cortona *Rape of the Sabines*, shows an immense difference between the two artists. Cortona's is a delightful and colorful composition, as are most of the paintings for his patrons, the Schetti; it is painted with much elegance and looks as if it were a ballet. Poussin's two versions have a serious moral overtone, which changes the whole tenor of the subject.

Briganti's impressive work is of great value. It contains the first complete catalogue raisonné of the works of Cortona, one-hundred-and-thirty-five pages in length, with several new attributions. It is a scholarly work of monumental size and import, the value of which is greatly enhanced by two-hundred-and-eighty-nine very good illustrations and seventeen color plates which, unlike many, are a pleasure to look at, although perhaps a little too pretty.

WALTER FRIEDLAENDER
Institute of Fine Arts
New York University

Hans-Martin Rotermond

Rembrandt's Handzeichnungen und Radierungen zur Bibel, Württembergische Bibelanstalt Stuttgart, 315 pp., 256 ill.

Lahr/Schwarzwald: Verlag Ernst Kaufmann, 1963. DM 69.00

This is a fascinating and timely book. It is the work of a deeply committed theologian who has long shown an unusual sensibility to Rembrandt's artistic greatness. It will be read and pondered by many who are in need of guidance to one of the supreme manifestations of Christian art, Rembrandt's drawings and etchings from the Bible; although clearly written for the layman it should also be read and pondered by art historians.

Those who have been involved in research on Rembrandt's drawings and etchings during the last ten years or so have perhaps even more reason for humility than their colleagues who have been working on problems like "Giotton-Giotto," "Masolino-Masaccio" or "Master of Flémalle-Rogier van der Weyden." In the year 1957, Otto Benesch's fundamental corpus of Rembrandt's drawings was completed; Ludwig Münz's elaborate study and catalogue of Rembrandt's etchings had been published in 1952. Discrepancies of opinion regarding the authenticity of etchings, while in some cases serious, remain comparatively few—quite understandably so since we have here to do with a master's published (usually signed and dated) oeuvre—but the state of affairs with regard to the drawings can only be called deeply disturbing. In the biblical field, Benesch designated about 500 drawings as completely genuine or decisively retouched by Rembrandt, about 80 as copies after Rembrandt and about 70 as uncertain (in the widest sense of the word). I have consulted the four most elaborate reviews of Benesch's corpus, written by the scholars with the most comprehensive knowledge of this field,¹ and found that between them, they have rejected a total of 113 out of those 500 attributions, 40 of them by more than one vote. The disparity of views is perhaps most strikingly illustrated by the well-known group of drawings in the Munich Print Room (eleven of them with biblical subjects) which are tenaciously defended by Benesch and just as vigorously denounced as later forgeries by Rosenberg, Haverkamp Begemann and (with important technical considerations) by Wolfgang Wegner, whereas Sumowski is inclined to ascribe most of them to a pupil, possibly Maes. Another instance of devastating difference of opinion is that of the famous *Finding of Moses* in Amsterdam (no. 71 in the present book), which to Rosenberg and Haverkamp Begemann is entirely by Rembrandt's own hand, to Benesch a Ferdinand Bol retouched by Rembrandt, to Münz and Sumowski (after a change

¹ Jakob Rosenberg in *The Art Bulletin*, XXXVIII, 1956, pp. 63 ff. and XLI, 1959, pp. 108 ff.; J. G. van Gelder in *The Burlington Magazine*, XCVII, 1955, pp. 395 ff. and CIII, 1961, pp. 150 ff.; E. Haverkamp Begemann in *Kunstchronik*, 1961, pp. 10 ff., 50 ff., 85 ff.; Werner Sumowski in *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe*, VI, 1956-57, pp. 255 ff. and *idem*, *Bemerkungen zu Otto Benesch's Corpus der Rembrandtzeichnungen*, II, Bad Pyrmont, 1961.

of heart) entirely by Bol. Nobody denies that Bol painted a canvas from this sheet; but here we are, almost sixty years after Hofstede de Groot's pioneering efforts, obviously as uncertain as ever about Rembrandt's relationship to his pupils and the extent to which these pupils made use of the master's drawings, were corrected by him as they went about their work, or were inspired by him to surpass their usual performances.

Small wonder then that without in the least underestimating, let alone disparaging the often solid achievements of Benesch and his critics, one turns almost with relief, and perhaps with overly keen expectations, to a book which shuns stylistic criticism (particularly of the authoritarian type), except when the author is convinced of a disputed drawing's special importance for a fuller understanding of Rembrandt's religious art. Dr. Rotermond concentrates instead upon elucidating the strength, subtlety and profundity with which the drawings express the very heart of these stories from the Bible; and since he does this admirably well, he evokes hopes in the reader that with this method new and decisive criteria for or against the authenticity of drawings attributed to Rembrandt may have been found or foreshadowed. But since the author quite reasonably believes that in many cases pupils received sufficiently strong, spiritual guidance from their master to make important contributions of their own to Christian iconography (at least as far as we can judge on the basis of our inadequate knowledge of the master's own output), such vast hopes must on the whole be abandoned. In fact, the author derived from this situation the right to include in his selection some works which even in his own estimation are neither originals by Rembrandt nor copies after such originals. I believe that a decision on the justification of this procedure will have to be a very personal one, and I am inclined to take a middle road by welcoming some of these none-too-perfect specimens and regretting the appearance of others. It is good to keep in mind that a critical separation was far from being the intention of this book; but the fact remains that of the 219 drawings reproduced in it, ca. 20 are considered copies, 8 doubtful, and 16 are entirely omitted in Benesch's corpus; of these, a few have been restored to Rembrandt by Benesch's critics but in some instances at the cost of others which were accepted by him.

What Dr. Rotermond has to say about the interpretation of the Bible by Rembrandt and his closest entourage—there are certainly no late forgeries in his group—is always worth listening to, and his claim to be read with close attention rests firmly on a number of very enlightening articles which he had published previously in learned periodicals. He serves as a discreet and reliable guide through Rembrandt's Bible, here presented in historical order and divided into four large sections: History of the beginnings, of the patriarchs and Joseph; Narratives from the Life of Moses and the times of the Judges, Samuel, the Kings and Prophets; Childhood and public activities of Christ; Passion of Christ and events after the Resurrection. His analyses contain many perspicacious, and not infrequently novel observations. Basic features such as Rembrandt's