

# Reviews

## Pier Francesco Mola, 1612–1666.

Exhibition catalogue by Giuliano Briganti et al., 1989–90 (Museo Cantonale d'Arte, Lugano and Musei Capitolini, Rome). Drawings catalogued by Nicolas Turner with additional essays by Marcel Roethlisberger and Manuela Kahn-Rossi. 356 pp., numerous black and white illus., 63 color plates.

The exhibition devoted to Pier Francesco Mola in the fall and winter of 1989–90 had two venues: Lugano, near the artist's birthplace, Coldrerio; and Rome, where he was raised as a child and eventually settled for the last two decades of his life. A team of scholars was assembled to do justice to his achievements. Beginning with a short essay on aspects of his career and style by Giuliano Briganti, there are essays on the architecture of his father and uncle, Giacomo and Giovanni Battista Mola (Giovanni Curcio), on his relationship to the Roman art market (Luigi Spezzaferro), on the Roman context of his mature work (Erich Schleier), on the Swiss-Lombard context of his early career (Mauro Natale), on his contribution to the art of landscape (Marcel Roethlisberger), on his drawings (Nicolas Turner), on his caricatures (Manuela Kahn-Rossi), and on Giovanni Battista Mollo, with whom Mola has often been confused (Pierre Rosenberg). The catalogues of his paintings (Laura Laureati), frescoes (Altamaria Tantillo), and drawings and prints (Turner) comprise 175 items with an additional twenty-eight entries on works by Roman and Luganese contemporaries. Regrettably for such a long and detailed collaborative work of scholarship, there is neither a full list of all illustrated works nor an index. Such an elaborate tribute to an artist who had few public commissions, whose early career is barely documented and whose later career was plagued by a devastating lawsuit against a penny-pinching aristocratic patron who destroyed a major fresco commission by Mola rather than pay the price the artist believed he deserved, and finally by severe health problems, testifies to the strong appeal of Mola's artistic personality among scholars and collectors of Seicento painting and drawing.

The exhibition brought together most of his best easel paintings from public and private collections, and even

a few of his Roman altarpieces, but the experience had to be completed by visits to his frescoes in Coldrerio and Rome, Nettuno and Viterbo. The biggest lacuna for this writer was the absence of any visual reference, except a small sketch for the figure of the saint (cat. no. III.71), to Mola's last masterpiece, the *Vision of St. Bruno* (Malibu, The J. Paul Getty Museum) of 1662–63. If the painting could not be included in the exhibition, it should have been a priority to illustrate it in the catalogue and one of the more elaborate related preparatory studies should have appeared as a stand-in (Turner is right to suspect that the drawing in the Städtisches Kunstinstitut, Frankfurt, Inv. no. 423, is a copy). As it was, Mola's career seemed to peter out in a flurry of mordant, self-mocking caricatures. The results of several important recent discoveries could be incorporated into the catalogue—color plates of his frescoes in Viterbo and Nettuno, a transcript of the inventory of his household possessions made shortly after his death (in an Appendix to Spezzaferro's essay), and a sketch of the artistic personality of Giovanni Battista Pace, whose *Vision of St. Jerome* at Buscot Park has long been regarded as one of Mola's finest late works (Schleier). Thus it provides a kind of summary of the state of research into Pier Francesco Mola's career, which is still some way from being fully charted and understood.

Only one aspect of Mola's artistic achievement could be adequately demonstrated in the exhibition, namely his drawings. Over 120 examples were chosen by Nicolas Turner, mainly from European public collections. He then made a representative selection for each location to reduce light exposure to the gall ink Mola preferred. Expertly avoiding most of the booby traps awaiting drawing connoisseurs in this area, Turner assembled an almost faultless group of drawings that do justice both to Mola's achievements as a draughtsman and reveal the perplexing variety of media and techniques that he commanded. The selection includes a number of unpublished sheets, among them two beautiful drawings in Oslo, and the entries are full of astute and sensitive comments about Mola's technique and style. Turner has also written one of the best essays in the catalogue, with much useful information about medium, function, provenance, and the origins and impact of Mola's drawing style. I would gladly have sacrificed some of the material on Mola's provincial North



Figure 1 GUGLIELMO CORTESE.  
St. Eustace in a Landscape.  
New York, *Jak Katalan*.

Italian contemporaries for more material from Turner on artists such as Pietro Testa, Guglielmo Cortese, Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, Andrea di Leone, and Mattia Preti, whose drawings have been confused with those of Mola in the past. The problem of Mola and Cortese is acute, for the latter's pen and ink composition studies are little known, unlike his chalk preparatory studies, which survive in large numbers, splendidly catalogued by Dieter Graf (Düsseldorf) and Simonetta Rodinò (Rome). I reproduce here a small composition drawing by Cortese of *St. Eustace in a Landscape* (Fig. 1) acquired by a private collector as the work of Mola. Its blunter, straighter lines and tonally less varied wash are, however, characteristic of Cortese.

Mola was one of the outstanding draughtsmen of the seventeenth century. He loved to draw, both because he took visual pleasure in the physical properties of all the media involved and because he responded to the spontaneity of the creative act that drawing afforded him. It is surely significant that a relatively large number of his drawings have been preserved (probably over two hundred)—although the evidence suggests that Mola himself did not hoard and protect them as, for example, Domenichino did—while Mola's surviving *oeuvre* as a painter active for at least thirty years is relatively small. Mola preferred the play of compositional ideas that he

could indulge in quickly in a drawing to the demands of the more disciplined elaboration of these ideas in paint. He almost certainly avoided by and large the process that was standard for most Roman painters then of preparing individual figure and drapery studies once the composition of a narrative painting had been established. Instead he played with themes and gestures in a way that current rules of decorum would not have allowed in a more permanent medium. And he experimented as well with the tones of wash over clean paper, over patches of black chalk and red chalk underdrawing, over wet and dry pen lines, over toned paper, and with the contrast of rough and smooth strokes, dotted textures and parallel (rarely crossed) hatching, or a few patches of pastel or watercolor. He studied and learned from the drawings of all the Carracci, of Francesco Albani and Guercino, of Pietro Testa, Andrea Sacchi, Claude Lorrain, and, we can assume, since he owned a group of them, from those of Agostino Tassi. In sum, Mola is the Seicento drawing connoisseurs' dream—an artist who not only challenges our abilities to spot his characteristic handwriting amid a dizzying range of possibilities but who plays knowingly on our awareness of his contemporaries' drawing styles as well. The more the spectator knows the subject, the more pleasures Mola offers. And until quite recently, his scrapper efforts could still be had in the London sale rooms for relatively modest sums. In the catalogue, the impact of the drawings reproduced on a larger scale in color (between pages 104 and 127) almost makes up for the reduced effect of the remainder in smaller black and white illustrations in the text.

A few comments on individual items follow in a spirit, I hope, of shared knowledge and enthusiasms rather than with any implied note of inadequacies on the part of Turner. He took up a difficult subject, an artist who has fooled everyone who has tried to pin him down in the past. Even tentative attributions were carefully selected to give specialists a chance to make useful decisions in front of relevant comparative examples. Abbreviated references can be traced in the bibliography of the exhibition catalogue.

**III.1** *The Virgin Appearing with the Image of St. Dominic at Soriano*. Haarlem, Teylers Museum. Cocke had suggested Poussin's drawing of the 1630s as a source of stylistic influence on this early Roman drawing, but I



Figure 2 FRANCISCO ALBANI.  
Vision of St. Jerome.  
Holkham Hall, Trustees of the Holkham Hall Estate.

agree with Turner that the similarity is not close. A more apt comparison can be made with the rare finished composition drawings in pen and ink by both Francesco Albani and Domenichino, although Mola's wash is already more varied in tone and thus more luminous than theirs. Since Albani's style in this medium is little known, I reproduce here his *Vision of St. Jerome* at Holkham Hall (Fig. 2).

**III.16** *Composition Study for The Martyrdom of SS. Abdon and Sennon.* Rome, Gabinetto Nazionale delle Stampe e Disegni. Given the rarity of individual figure studies by Mola, it is a pity that a black chalk drawing

in the Louvre (Inv. no. 14826; here Fig. 3) for the executioner on the left of this fresco was not chosen instead of this frequently published and slightly atypical composition study. The figure study was first published by J.F. Méjanès in 1983. Another rare survival, also in black chalk and never published, despite an old attribution to Mola, is in the Uffizi (Inv. no. 6804 S; 255 x 192 mm.; here Fig. 4). It is connected with the standing male spectator wearing a violet cloak being addressed by the Baptist in the Louvre painting of *St. John the Baptist Preaching* (I.21).

**III.29** *Study for an Immaculate Conception.* New York, Private Collection. While Turner was aware of the related study sheet in the collection of Duke Roberto Ferretti, he was apparently unaware of the composition study in Munich published by Erich Schleier in his essay in the exhibition catalogue (p. 63, fig. 5), which shows the Holy Trinity in the sky above the Virgin, a motif eliminated in the New York drawing. A third composition study, much rougher and evidently the earliest of the three, was recently on the art market (New York, Christie's, 15 January 1992, lot no. 27, as Circle of Guido Reni; black chalk, pen and brown ink, brown wash, the outlines incised, the corners cut, 267 x 191 mm.). Since it was not illustrated, it is shown here (Fig. 5). In this last drawing, which also includes the Trinity in the sky above the Virgin, the composition is more open and spacious than in the final design. Turner's hypothesis that the composition may have been made to be engraved rather than as a design for a banner, is plausible, given the exceptional finish of the New York design.

**III.32** *Project for the Ceiling of the Stanza dell'ARIA, Palazzo Pamphili at Valmontone.* Madrid, Real Academia de San Fernando. I agree with Turner that this elaborate drawing seems to be a copy by Giovanni Francesco Grimaldi after a lost *modello* by Mola for his ill-fated Valmontone commission. It is a dry example of Grimaldi's work, probably because it is a relatively late work. His style did not change once he had mastered his polished derivation of the Carracci landscape idiom, and line-for-line copies by him after the work of other more distinguished hands are known (Windsor Castle, Inv. no. 3552, Kurz 291, is a clever copy of a drawing by An-

nibale Carracci that passed through the London sale rooms a few years ago). A sheet by Grimaldi in Haarlem has an autograph note on it to the effect that he has lent Mola his “libro di paesi,” thus documenting a relationship between them.

**III.40** *Juno Imploring Aeolus to Free the Winds*. Windsor Castle, Royal Library. This drawing, long attributed to Pietro da Cortona, was recently given to Mola instead by Bruce Davis, who related it to Mola’s depiction of this theme at Valmontone. Turner accepts this proposal, but I do not believe that the drawing is by Mola. In Mola’s sketches for Valmontone, Juno and Aeolus are always further apart. More significant is the atypical pen line, scratchier and less curvaceous and fluid throughout the sheet than is ever the case with Mola. The author of this variation on Mola’s design is probably to be found in Mola’s circle. Giovanni Battista Pace, the subject of a recent article in this periodical by Richard Cocks (XXIX, 4, 1991, pp. 347–84), is one plausible candidate, though his drawing personality as reconstructed by Cocks varies confusingly between pastiches of Mola, Cortona, and Maratti, making the character of a Pace drawing difficult to grasp.

**III.48–49** *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*. Haarlem, Teylers Museum and Berlin, SMPK, Kupferstichkabinett. Turner provides a sensitive analysis of the differences between these almost identical sheets, arguing that the Haarlem version is the stronger and primary version but taking no stand before the exhibition about the status of the Berlin sheet. I was not able to attend the exhibition in Lugano, where both sheets were shown, but careful study of good photographs (I have seen both drawings in the flesh on other occasions) suggests to me that both are autograph. I agree with Turner that the technique of the Berlin drawing is slightly less spontaneous, but nevertheless it seems to be sufficiently free in its handling to be an autograph variant.

**III.58** *The Creation of Adam*. Oxford, Christ Church. This is an intriguing drawing. A photograph of it has long been in my “perpetual puzzle” file. It is not impossible that Mola drew it, but the use of brush tip exclusively for the main composition makes it difficult to find convincing technical parallels with his other drawings,



Figure 3 PIER FRANCESCO MOLA.  
Study for an Executioner in *The Martyrdom of SS. Abdon and Sennon*.  
Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques.

except for a few strokes—always a dangerous game—and the herms drawn in chalk on either side of the frame are not characteristic of Mola’s graphic technique either. Unless other drawings in these techniques that can be connected with accepted paintings can be found, the attribution of this drawing to Mola does not seem justified.

**III.67–70** *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques; Paris, Private Collection; Lille, Musée des Beaux-Arts; and Princeton University Art Museum. To this group of studies can be added another, more schematic sheet in the Musée des Beaux-Arts, Orléans (Album 2, no. 134, pen and brown ink on cream paper, 213 x 265 mm.), which shows Joseph collecting water from a spout projecting from a rock, while Mary and the Child wait on the donkey to the left (Fig. 6). Another unpublished Mola drawing in Orléans (Inv. no. 1641F) combines a



Figure 4 PIER FRANCESCO MOLA.  
Study for a Figure in *St. John the Baptist Preaching*.  
Florence, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe.

study of a male figure wearing a turban pointing toward an unspecified object and a half-length sketch of a male figure glancing out at the spectator, which seems to be a self-portrait (Fig. 7).

**III.82** *Landscape*. Stockholm, Nationalmuseum. I do not find the technical parallels between this sketch of trees drawn with the point of the brush and Mola's other landscape drawings very close. These trees are more generic than Mola's, and Mola rarely gives his pen up completely.

**III.84** *Three Children Playing with a Rabbit and a Cat*. Oxford, Christ Church. A pen and ink drawing of *Charity* by Mola at Princeton catalogued as from the school of the Carracci by Felton Gibbons in 1977 (no. 160; fig.



Figure 5 PIER FRANCESCO MOLA.  
Study for an Immaculate Conception.  
Formerly New York, Art Market.

5) comes close to the Christ Church drawing of children playing and should surely be attributed to Mola. There is another overlooked pen and wash sketch of babies with classical fragments in a landscape by Mola at Chatsworth (Inv. no. 605, as Testa).

**III.87** *Studies of Sleeping Figures on the Ground*. Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland. This genre drawing, acquired recently by the National Gallery, is not by Mola. The washes obliterate the forms of the two sleeping figures, making the shapes laid in by the pen lines hard to read, and the use of pure point of brush and wash for the pots in the left foreground is also atypical.

**III.88** *Plague Victims on a Street*. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques. There is a far stronger treatment of this composition in the Albertina, Vienna, with an old attribution to Magnasco (Inv. no. 2905; here Fig. 8). The attribution to Mola, first

proposed by Sherman Lee, was accepted by Keith Andrews and Jacob Bean, according to my notes. The Louvre drawing, which has the paraph of Antoine Coypel (Lugt 476) and Robert de Cotte (Lugt 1963) inscribed in the upper left corner, is drawn with uncharacteristic caution and with a revealing misunderstanding of the relationship of the feet of the main figure to his body. Many of the drawings in the Louvre with these paraphs, many of which came from the Jabach collection, are proving to be clever imitations of a variety of seventeenth-century Italian hands by Michel Corneille the Younger, as Catherine Monbeig-Goguel has pointed out to me and other visitors to the Cabinet des Dessins recently. I believe that this drawing may well prove to be another of Michel Corneille's imitations.

**III.91** *Caricature of a Man Holding a Hat.* London, British Museum. I doubt that this drawing is by Mola. It is too conventional graphically. The face and hands are drawn in a way that has no parallel in any generally accepted drawing, a significant fact when judging Mola's caricatures, which are not drawn differently from his other figure sketches.

**III.96** *Two Connoisseurs Admiring a Painting.* New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library. This caricature is not by Mola. The line lacks his fluidity and the features of both figures lack any of Mola's characteristic tricks for noses, feet, hands, and eyes. The thin, almost non-existent feet of the tall man can be compared with the shod feet in all the other exhibited caricatures. Mola likes to make the feet excessively long and he does not taper the toes, but squares them off. The style of this sheet, in the Morgan Library's Janos Scholz collection, might be called "generic Seicento caricature."

**III.116** *St. John the Baptist in the Wilderness.* Stockholm, Nationalmuseum. This is an extraordinarily beautiful drawing in which the red chalk has been stumped and accented with reddish wash to create subtle tonal effects almost unparalleled among Mola's published drawings. The only comparable sheet is a study in the British Museum of *Two Putti* (III. 5), squared for transfer, which can be connected with Mola's frescoes in Nettuno. I have sometimes wondered whether the Stockholm sheet is by Mola, not because it is unworthy of him but rather because the technique and uncharacteristic physiog-



Figure 6 PIER FRANCESCO MOLA.  
Study for a Flight into Egypt.  
Orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts.



Figure 7 PIER FRANCESCO MOLA.  
Studies of a Man with a Turban and a Man Holding  
an Unidentified Object.  
Orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts.





Figure 8 PIER FRANCESCO MOLA.  
Plague Victims on a Street.  
Vienna, Albertina.

nomy of the figure do not fit. The drawings of Guglielmo Cortese offer some close parallels both for the way wash is used to lay in the landscape setting (cf., for example, Cortese, 1979, no. 138) and for the subtly shaded anatomical details of the torso and legs (cf. Cortese, 1979, nos. 17, 18), but no surviving published drawing by Cortese looks quite like the Stockholm sheet either.

**III.121** *Hunter with Three Dogs*, Paris, Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques. Turner notes the similarity of this red chalk drawing in the Louvre to French eighteenth-century academic drawings. The pose of the hunter even recalls that of Poussin's *Orion* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art). I believe that the drawing is, in fact, French and not by Mola.

**III.122** *Bacchanal in a Wood*. London, Victoria and Albert Museum. Turner exhibited this drawing because a number of scholars have accepted it, while others have challenged the attribution to Mola. The confusing, scribbly pen lines and dark wash that obliterates the forms rather than accenting them seem to me to exclude it firmly from Mola's *oeuvre*.

**III.123** *Diana and Endymion*. Düsseldorf, Kunstmuseum. I still believe that this drawing is by Guglielmo Cortese, despite Cocke's arguments in favor of an attribution to G. B. Pace (*Master Drawings*, 1991, p. 381). The bold chiaroscuro contrasts and scratchy pen lines of the recto are typical of Cortese (cf. Graf, 1976, nos. 21, 45, 107). The more confused pen and chalk strokes on the verso are rarely found in such a dense concentration on one page, but similar passages can be found among



Figure 9 PIER FRANCESCO MOLA.  
Self-Portrait (?).  
Present whereabouts unknown.

the large groups of his drawings in Düsseldorf and Rome (for example, Rodinò, 1979, nos. 92, 116v).

Finally, I would like to publish here another portrait drawing by Mola (Fig. 9), which was formerly in the Rudolf collection (London, Sotheby's, 19 May 1977, lot no. 100, as Baldassare Franceschini, an attribution proposed by Hermann Voss; present location unknown). Like the *Self-Portrait* drawing in the Uffizi illustrated in color in the catalogue (p. 20), the ex-Rudolf drawing is in colored chalks. It measures 312 x 243 mm. The features of the sitter are close to those of Mola himself, and it is possible that this is also a self-portrait of the artist in a less forbidding mood than he presents in the Uffizi drawing. An identification with Niccolò Simonelli, the artist's close friend and patron, does not seem probable (cf. the portrait of Simonelli attributed to G. M. Morandi in a private collection, illustrated in the catalogue, p. 47).

Ann Sutherland Harris

## Vouet.

Exhibition catalogue by Jacques Thuillier, with Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée and Denis Lavalle, 1990–91 (Grand Palais, Paris). 552 pp., 309 black and white illus., 87 color plates.

Simon Vouet (1590–1649) has long been regarded as the harbinger of the new drawing style that reigned in France from the time of Louis XIII until the later eighteenth century. Both Isaac Bullart and André Félibien emphasized the importance that Vouet had for the practice of drawing both as a master draughtsman and as a teacher. Despite such high recognition from his contemporaries, the graphic work of Vouet and of other seventeenth-century French masters was until recently relegated to the periphery of a universe that revolved around Italian and Dutch drawings. Over the last two decades, this imbalance has been reduced by such exhibitions as *Dessins Français du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1985) and Hilliard Goldfarb's *Drawing in France. From Fontainebleau to the Louvre* (Cleveland Museum of Art, 1989). Vouet's own star is on the rise as well, particularly after Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée published a *catalogue raisonné* of his drawings in public collections in 1987.<sup>1</sup>

Now Vouet has received the ultimate accolade of a breathtaking exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris, held during the winter of 1990–91. This impressive retrospective, planned to celebrate the quadricentenary of Vouet's birth, was organized by Jacques Thuillier, who personally selected and wrote the catalogue entries for the 154 paintings displayed. Thuillier's supporting team was composed of Barbara Brejon de Lavergnée, who wrote the chapter on the seventy-five drawings exhibited ("Simon Vouet et le Dessin," pp. 357–485), and Denis Lavalle, who was in charge of the twenty tapestries present in the show. This exhibition was magistrally capped off with an international symposium in which leading scholars of seventeenth-century French art delivered papers on various aspects of Vouet's career and influence.<sup>2</sup> The accompanying exhibition catalogue, where all the displayed works of art are sumptuously illustrated, will remain the primary source for anyone interested in the *oeuvre* of Vouet.

Barbara Brejon, as the expert on Vouet's drawings, was invited to return to the topic of Vouet as draughtsman. The number of drawings in the exhibition was