

Rhoda Eitel-Porter. *Der Zeichner und Maler Cesare Nebbia, 1536–1614*. Römische Studien der Bibliotheca Hertziana 18. Munich: Hirmer Verlag GmbH, 2009. 343 pp. index. append. illus. €90. ISBN: 978–3–7774–9970–3.

To most nonspecialists of late-Renaissance Italian art, Cesare Nebbia, a protégé of the talented Brescian painter Girolamo Muziano, is a virtual unknown. If one were to judge the importance of an artist on the prominence of the locations of his works and the number of paintings that he executed or for which he provided designs, however, Nebbia would have to be considered a master of the highest rank. Indeed, he was responsible for painting and designing such vast quantities of imagery — adorning such exalted spaces as the Vatican and Lateran Palaces, the Lateran's Benediction Loggia, the Vatican Library, St. Peter's, the Scala Santa, S. Maria Maggiore, and numerous other churches and oratories in Rome and his native Orvieto — that they can only be measured in square acres. Although not as gifted as his teacher, Muziano, or such contemporaries as Federico Barocci and Federico Zuccari, Nebbia was, as his early biographer Giovanni Baglione characterized him, an “accomplished painter” who continued Muziano's reform style and played a pivotal role in the development of what has been called the “stile Sistino.” He was also a prolific and inventive draftsman, and it is his drawings that are the primary focus of Rhoda Eitel-Porter's new volume.

A traditional monograph in its content and structure, Eitel-Porter's *Cesare Nebbia* begins with an overview of “Mannerism and the Counter Reformation,” the literature on Nebbia (from the sixteenth century to the present), and the aim and organization of her study. Chapter 2 succinctly treats Nebbia's life and works and chapter 3 discusses, again briefly, the history of the collecting of Nebbia's drawings, Nebbia as a draftsman, the materials and style of his drawings, and issues pertaining to distinguishing Nebbia's graphic works from those of Muziano. In chapters 4

though 10, which constitute the heart of the volume, Eitel-Porter presents Nebbia's oeuvre, in chronological fashion, starting with his early works in Orvieto, Perugia, and Rome, and then his major works for Gregory XIII and the nonpapal commissions of the early 1580s. She next turns to the projects carried out for Sixtus V, for whom he served, along with Giovanni Guerra, as official painter, and to his private and papal commissions of the later 1580s and '90s, including, notably, the cartoons for two of the pendentive mosaics in St. Peter's and the fresco of *Constantine's Dream of Peter and Paul* in the transept of the Lateran basilica, both executed for Clement VIII. Finally, she turns to his late works in Pavia — his frescoes in the Collegio Borromeo carried out for Cardinal Federico Borromeo — and Orvieto, where he closed out his career as it had begun by painting altarpieces for the city's cathedral. The short concluding chapter addresses Nebbia's stylistic development and his workshop, influence, and legacy. The text is followed by a catalogue of Nebbia's drawings, with illustrations, an appendix of selected documents, and a bibliography.

Throughout her study, Eitel-Porter focuses clearly on Nebbia's drawings and their place in the preparatory process for his own and other artists' paintings. The corpus of drawings presented, many of them discovered or attributed to Nebbia by the author, is impressive both in its size and range. Nebbia was a versatile draftsman, as adept at making rapid pen and ink studies (*primi pensieri*) as carefully worked presentation drawings and cartoons. Although some might quibble with some of her attributions, the vast majority seem right, and the Nebbia that emerges from her study is an imaginative and facile draftsman, capable of producing — no matter how obscure the subject matter — clear and easily comprehensible compositions, in accord with post-Tridentine demands.

With the goal of establishing a definitive corpus of Nebbia's drawings, Eitel-Porter pays only passing attention to historical context, iconography, and art theory, but her notes are rich in citations to both primary sources and the secondary literature. Her catalogue includes nearly 300 drawings, including those she believes to be autograph, those attributed to Nebbia and his workshop, and copies after lost originals. Eight cited drawings are also listed, as are seventy-two rejected attributions. Regrettably all three sections of the catalogue are arranged by location (city): more helpful would have been an arrangement structured by chronology, projects, or subject. The 200 illustrations are of a high quality, although none are in color, and no comparative illustrations (for example, drawings by Giovanni Guerra) are provided. These minor criticisms aside, Eitel-Porter has done a service to the field, providing a cogent, learned, and comprehensive discussion of Cesare Nebbia as a draftsman, which is certain to become the key source on the artist for curators and other scholars of late Renaissance Italian art.

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