

Critical Perspectives on Roman Baroque Sculpture. Anthony Colantuono and Steven F. Ostrow, eds.

University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014. xv + 272 pp. \$84.95.

The eleven essays assembled here range widely across Roman Baroque sculpture, offering interesting and occasionally contentious assessments of current research. If the cumulative effect does not alter the topography, it does, nonetheless, illuminate different features of a well-known landscape.

It may be significant that there are two articles on Francesco Mochi, who has become the new Bernini. His intellectual appeal is obvious, for Mochi was already a seasoned practitioner when Bernini was a wunderkind. Tuscan by training but also molded by the Veneto sculptor Camillo Mariani, he evolved an idiosyncratic style that did not bend to the overwhelming influence of Bernini but was famously dismissed by Wittkower as “a severe form of mannerism.” Both Michael Cole and Estelle Longo make strong cases for a second look, especially in terms of the ill-starred *Saints Peter and Paul* for the Benedictines of San Paolo fuori le Mura. With new archival information, Longo demonstrates that the commission was imposed on the monks by Urban VIII in 1630 and that the design of the two figures was established by the middle of that decade. She

also suggests that the archaizing features of the apostles can best be understood with reference to medieval icons and the spectral interior of the now-destroyed basilica.

The paucity of theoretical discussions of sculpture in Seicento Rome is a recurrent theme in the contributions by Maria Cristina Fortunati and Damian Dombrowski. The former offers cogent reasons for the delay in the publication of Orfeo Boselli's treatise, which would have filled that gap, while the latter presents an ingenious explanation for the revival of sculptural altarpieces in seventeenth-century Rome. In particular, Dombrowski detects a "mistrust towards sculptures in the service of liturgy" (122) during the Counter-Reformation period, grounded in issues of idolatry and iconoclasm. While noting an absence of contemporary theoretical writing on this subject, he falls back upon visual evidence to support his case. Thus works like de' Rossi's *Saint Joseph and Jesus* in the Pantheon, Algardi's *Saint Philip Neri and the Angel* in the Vallicella, and even Bernini's *Saint Teresa* "banish the danger of idolatry by narrativity" (133) — that is, the statues enact a narrative rather than serve as objects of veneration in themselves. This seems a tenuous peg on which to hang a thesis about the reemergence of sculptural altarpieces during the Seicento, and one could equally well argue that it was the blossoming of sculptural talent in Rome during the first quarter of the century that led to the vogue for marble altarpieces.

Bernini appears directly in two essays here, one of which, by Christina Strunck, revisits the well-trodden terrain of the *Rape of Proserpina*. It is an essay that takes "a contextual approach to the problem of reception," as the editors note in their introduction (10), and Strunck argues that the group, generally thought to have been commissioned by Scipione Borghese for himself and subsequently given to Ludovico Ludovisi, was actually intended from the first as a "poisoned present" for his rival, embodying "the futility of human life" (192). It was thus a warning to the new cardinal *nipote* about his fleeting moment of glory. The concept of hidden meanings is often controversial, but here we are asked to believe that Borghese, generally described as ignorant and indolent, would go to such effort and expense to convey a secret message through Bernini's sculpture. If, as Sir Lewis Namier famously said, the crowning attainment of historical study is to achieve an intuitive sense of how things do not happen, then that is not evident in Strunck's line of thinking.

Perhaps the most noteworthy of the articles are those devoted to the French sculptor and theoretician Michel Anguier, who spent a decade in Rome from 1641, studying modern art and antiquity in the circle of Nicolas Poussin. Both Julia Dobbs and Aline Magnien focus upon Anguier's *conférences* at the French Academy, the former addressing Anguier's use of the theory of the humors to analyze classical statuary, the latter exploring the different concepts of imitation of nature and the issue of "optical corrections" (222) according to Bernini and Anguier. Both articles complement each other and present genuinely new contributions to French academic theory, although what this has to do with Roman Baroque sculpture seems a moot point.

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