

Sandra Gianfreda. *Caravaggio, Guercino, Mattia Preti: Das halbfigurige Historienbild und die Sammler des Seicento*.

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In her meticulous study, the first fully devoted to the half-figure history painting of the Seicento, Sandra Gianfreda examines a wide range of issues and sources to explain the significance of this popular picture type. This volume, a revision of her dissertation (Universität Bern, 2001), explores the development of the half-figure history, the functions and demands it fulfilled, its place and placement in Seicento collections, its pricing and marketing, the relationship between patron and artist, and even the competition to the half-figure type. Her sources include art theory and criticism, account books, and collectors' inventories from the period. Although the book's title names only Caravaggio, Guercino, and Mattia Preti, many other artists working in the half-figure format are also discussed. By organizing her study around these protagonists, she creates a structure for examining the vicissitudes of the half-figure history across the century — from Caravaggio's revival of it in 1598–99 to the near cessation of its production in Italy with Preti's death in 1699.

Chapter 1 explores the artistic and theoretical influences on Caravaggio's revival of the half-length type. Gianfreda contributes fresh observations about the potential impact of Netherlandish painting (including the genre-like treatment of sacred themes), of North Italian painting in Lombardy and the Veneto (including life-size, half-figure paintings for private devotion), and of the Carracci in Bologna, particularly Ludovico's *Kiss of Judas*. She observes that Caravaggio's fusion of influences into a novel rendition makes it difficult to trace specific models. In his *Conversion of Mary Magdalene* and *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, the paintings that introduced the half-figure history in Rome, Caravaggio utilized his trademark strategy of representing a single dramatic moment that concentrates on the emotion of the figures. She considers the possible influence of Leonardo da Vinci's physiognomy studies and the theoretical statements of Leonardo, Alberti, and Lomazzo. They all advised artists to depict the movements of the soul, considered the most difficult to paint. Gianfreda implies that Caravaggio, in attempting this in his first life-size, half-figure religious paintings, endeavored to prove his skills and win large-scale public church commissions. The half-figure type, intended for collectors, continued to be reserved primarily for biblical and other religious themes.

Next, Gianfreda considers the demands that the half-figure history fulfilled by scrutinizing the work of Caravaggio, Guercino, and Preti in relation to art theory

and statements by artists, biographers, and clients. She presents Cristoforo Roncalli's oration before the Academia di S. Luca in 1594 as a possible stimulus for Caravaggio's innovations. Roncalli emphasized that *historia* represented the greatest work of artists and that their most difficult challenge was depicting the expression of figures' emotions. Roncalli thus invoked one aim of classical rhetoric: to move the viewer (*movere*), which Gianfreda defines as Caravaggio's primary intention. Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti, who became codirector of the Academia, named all three aims of rhetoric — *delectare*, *docere*, *movere* — as the tasks of painting. Gianfreda acknowledges that neither Roncalli nor Paleotti specifically mentions the half-figure type. However, she points out that Caravaggio's life-size figures could best move the viewer while the half-figure format was suited for private collectors, where cost may have been a factor. She then examines how Guercino and Preti perpetuated and reinterpreted the type later in the century, also applying the aims of rhetoric. Citing clients' expectations, she proposes that Guercino may have changed from a dark to a brighter palette and clearer representation to fill the task of moral instruction (*docere*). She argues that Preti, who began in midcentury to enlarge the picture surface to include many figures and the surrounding environment, emphasized the task of delighting the viewer (*delectare*). Gianfreda proposes the relevance of the quarrel between Andrea Sacchi and Pietro da Cortona. While Sacchi advocated focusing on few figures as in tragedy, Cortona compared painting to epic in which additional scenes adorned and served to delight and amuse. If the author is somewhat too rigid in assigning single specific tasks to each artist's half-figure renditions, she significantly advances our understanding of the theoretical issues and debates that would have influenced these images.

Lastly, Gianfreda investigates the half-figure history painting in the context of collections. Through analysis of the inventories of Vincenzo Giustiniani, Asdrubale Mattei, and others, she finds that, with the exception of Mattei, the half-figure formed part of collections that included many other types of paintings (subjects and formats). Two of her discussions offer useful counterpoints for understanding the place of the half-figure history painting in the collection context: 1) the competition presented by Poussin, whose full-length classical and mythological paintings provided collectors with an alternative, and 2) the Gallerie Vrillière in Paris, devoted to full-figure, classical histories by Italian artists, including Guercino, as well as Poussin.

The volume is well-documented and includes an appendix with the text of Roncalli's oration. Although fully illustrated, its photographs are in black-and-white, small, and grouped at the back of the volume, making it difficult to follow the author's insightful visual analyses. Gianfreda's study is nevertheless admirable for its thorough analysis of Seicento records for what they tell us, and what they don't reveal, about this specialized painting type. It will be a valuable reference for all interested in the half-figure format in European painting.

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