

## BOOK REVIEW

***Il mercato dei quadri a Roma nel diciottesimo secolo: la domanda, l'offerta e la circolazione delle opere in un grande centro artistico europeo.*** By Paolo Coen. Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore. 2010. 2 vols. 876 p. 32 col. plates. €80 (hb). ISBN 978-88-222-5895-9.

This publication provides a much-needed and comprehensive insight into the eighteenth-century art market in Rome. It covers the demand, supply and circulation of paintings in this European capital city of the arts. Paolo Coen has written extensively on the Italian art market and its relation to the British market. In this book, he describes who were the collectors, the sellers and agents and how works changed hands, provides the histories and doings of colourful figures, and documents exchanges of goods to illustrate his arguments. This book is the fruit of many years of research, as is clear in Coen's numerous manuscript references.

The book has two volumes, with the second being an appendix of transcripts of primary sources. Colour illustrations are included in the first volume. Volume I is divided into two parts, one dedicated to the individuals that populated the art market and the other covering the business side of the subject. The introduction provides an overview of Rome as a location where art was bought and sold from the sixth century up to the seventeenth. A memorable reference is made to Albrecht Dürer travelling with a stock of paintings and prints to sell during his trips to Venice and Antwerp, where he also acted as an agent for others.

The first five chapters describe professional dealers of paintings, or *quadrari*, artists as dealers, art experts, speculators and mediators such as brokers and agents. The *quadrari* operated from shops or houses on a busy street. They sold low-priced paintings of genre scenes, portraits of dignitaries and sacred imagery aimed at the middle and lower classes. Some, such as Giovanni Barbarossa, also kept a few high-quality works by master painters for eminent clients. Professional dealers of sculpture, books, prints, drawings, antiquities and furniture also dealt in paintings.

Artists kept a stock of paintings including their own and those of their workshop. The most famous of the artist-dealers is Carlo Maratti, who sold Old Master works by the likes of Giovanni Bellini and Nicolas Poussin. The Scottish painter and dealer Gavin Hamilton's most renowned sale is undoubtedly that of the *Virgin of the Rocks* by Leonardo da Vinci, now at the National Gallery in London. Another Scotsman, James Byres, was an influential dealer among clients on their Grand Tour. Art experts included erudite personalities and collectors who were highly cultured and well travelled. They gave opinions, attributions and valuations. Among the figures Coen writes about is the connoisseur Cardinal Alessandro Albani, who could count King George III of England as his client.

Framers, gilders, carpenters, plasterers and makers of dyes and varnish kept an eye on paintings entering their workshops. Makers of paints, brushes and other raw materials were often paid by artists in paintings rather than money. Coen describes the master mason Giuseppe Sardi, who was also engaged to decorate the apartment blocks he built with paintings. Porters, barbers and bankers were speculators who traded in copies and works of lowest quality. Mediators such as brokers and agents found works of art for third parties, usually great collectors among royalty and aristocracy.

The second part of the book has four chapters dealing with the commercial specifics of art dealing, starting with a chapter on the merchandise. High prices were fetched by works of contemporary classical painters such as Pompeo Batoni, Anton Raphael Mengs, Francesco Trevisani and Carlo Maratti. The most valued paintings were by Old Masters such as Raphael, Leonardo, the Carraccis, Guido Reni, Poussin and Titian. The Flemish and Dutch school was also popular, including works by Rubens and Rembrandt. Caravaggio and his circle fetched much lower prices – a result of the highly influential writings of Giovanni Pietro Bellori, who advocated classical idealism as opposed to realism and High Baroque. Copies and fakes were common, but intended copies after or

attributed to Old Masters, known as *copie d'auteur*, fetched the same high prices as originals. Lowest prices were given to genre works, sacred images, paintings in bad state of conservation and pre-Renaissance painters.

Dealers' stock included works directly from the studios of contemporary artists and paintings bought during travels in the Roman provinces, the rest of Italy and beyond. They attended public auctions and lotteries and bought from private hands or bulk sales of family collections. Churches and convents needing money were also a good source. The best dealers had informants throughout Italy on the look-out for good investments. Buyers included the nobility on their Grand Tour, who engaged agents to keep providing paintings from Rome after their return home. European royalty sourced works of art from Rome to enlarge their collections as a show of their grandeur. Local merchants, servicemen and professionals bought low-priced works to decorate their homes. The lesser aristocracy borrowed works from dealers rather than buying. Businessmen, ecclesiastical figures and nobility adorned their palaces with paintings to show off their riches and culture.

The documents transcribed in the second volume are a goldmine of information for art historians and historians of commerce. They include transcripts of inventories of works in the collections of dealers, expert reports, auction catalogues, receipts, wills, requisitions and estimates. Anyone researching aspects of the art market, eighteenth-century art and artists and trade in Rome and Europe is sure to find useful material in this appendix.

This extensive study is very well researched, meticulous and divided into coherent sections. Its biggest contribution lies in the numerous examples of figures who formed part of the market, their daily activities, and details of specific deals and events that animate this book and capture the reader's interest throughout. This makes it attractive for both a general audience and for scholars. Unfortunately, it is available only in Italian. In 2018 Coen edited a volume in English on the same topic of the eighteenth-century Roman art market, published by Brill, including his extensive essay on the subject which no doubt elaborates on the research in this Italian publication.

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