

BOOKS

NEW BOOK ON PAINTING IN THE BAROQUE AGE

Pittura tra Malta e Napoli nel segno del barocco is the title of a lavishly illustrated new book that has just been published in Naples. Authored by architect Salvatore Costanzo who already has several publications on Baroque art and architecture to his credit, this new publication on Baroque art in Malta and Naples, 1650-1750, is introduced by Domenico Zinzi, president of the province of Caserta, Michele di Gianni, honorary consul of Malta in Naples and Professor Denis De Lucca, director of the International Institute for Baroque Studies at the University of Malta. In the words of the author, this book gathers together a mine of scattered information on artistic endeavour in Malta and Naples in the Baroque age, which developed within a complex artistic scenario characterized by innumerable stylistic cross-currents and overlaps, marked by the type of interactions between the great masters of the ilk of Mattia Preti (1613-1699) and Francesco Solimena (1657-1747) and a host of less known artists whose works are critically evaluated in this 475-page volume.

The book is divided into two sections. The first, entitled 'Malta', concerns itself with biographical sketches of a number of Maltese painters who were influenced by the lessons of Preti and, at a later stage, by the artistic moods of Solimena. Costanzo writes that the very Baroque decorative tendencies of Mattia Preti, evident in his work at the Conventual church of St John in Valletta, inspired one of his youngest followers, Raimondo De Dominici called "*Il Maltese*" to emigrate to Naples and there contribute to the exciting developments that were then happening in that city. Raimondo also fathered a son, Bernardo De Dominici, who later became the court painter of Aurora Sanseverino, the duchess of Laurenzano. The first section of the book also discusses the output of Preti's school: Gioacchino Caloriti, Pedro Nuñez de



Villavicencio, Giovanni Battista Caloriti and Gian Paolo Chiesa, all discussed in the context of the rival Neapolitan schools of painting which opposed Preti, championed by Stefano Erardi and Giuseppe d'Arena. Costanzo also analyses the influence of Preti, Chiesa and Solimena on the very successful Maltese Baroque painters Gian Nicola Buhagiar and Francesco Vincenzo Zahra.

The second section of the book, entitled '*Napoli*' focuses on the Neapolitan sojourn of Raimondo De Dominici who was here associated with the followers of the great Luca Giordano (1634-1705). Raimondo, according to Costanzo, was also influenced by several 'second-line' painters practicing in Naples at the time whose lives and works are critically examined in this book. His son, Bernardo, as court painter of the Duchess of Laurenzano, was in turn influenced by the German landscape painter Franz Joachim Beich and the Dutch painter Paul Ganses, who both dominated his formative years.

Considered in its wider context, the content of this book contributes a wealth of fresh ideas about the close contacts that existed between Hospitaller Valletta and Naples in the Baroque age, an indeed solid contribution to artistic knowledge that certainly provides much food for thought to students and scholars who would be interested in carrying out further research on some of the themes and paintings identified by the author. As happens in a gallery of beautiful paintings, the presentation and format of the volume evokes Corrado Rizza's definition of Baroque as '*un inno all'occhio e alla teoria della visione.*'