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Book Review: Baroque Naples and the Industry of Painting: The World in the Workbench

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Christopher R. Marshall

Baroque Naples and the Industry of Painting: The World in the Workbench

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Seventeenth-century Naples was the largest city in Italy, and the second largest in Europe after London. It was also home to a thriving school of painting, with homegrown artists such as Massimo Stanzione, Bernardo Cavallino, and Luca Giordano, as well as foreigners such as Caravaggio, Jusepe de Ribera, and Artemisia Gentileschi. Yet Neapolitan painting has been overshadowed by that of Bologna, Rome, or other schools of Italian painting. Although there has been no shortage of interest in particular artists or monuments, there exists no broader scholarly framework for understanding the development, production, and patronage of painting in Naples. This gap has been especially egregious in the English-speaking world, where the few comprehensive studies of the subject are long out of date.

Christopher R. Marshall's important new book, *Baroque Naples and the Industry of Painting: The World in the Workbench*, provides a comprehensive, authoritative corrective to this neglect. Focusing on the material and economic realities of artistic life in seventeenth-century Naples—workshop practices, contracts, prices, collecting, patronage, and reception—Marshall simultaneously introduces English-speaking audiences to the major trends and protagonists of Neapolitan art in the Baroque age, and also provides new and vivid insight into its artists' daily lives. Marshall shows a mastery of the archives, secondary literature, and the works themselves that can only come from a lifetime of dedication to the topic. He traces the changing status of art and artists from the relatively provincial Naples of the 1580s, through the transformative visits of Caravaggio to the city in 1606–7 and 1609, to the city's entrance onto the global artistic stage in the age of Giordano. Although Neapolitans were keenly aware of artistic developments in Rome or Bologna, Naples emerges here as the artistic capital of an empire more closely connected to Genoa, Palermo, Valencia, Antwerp, and Vienna than with the traditional "centers" of Italian art.

The hefty volume comprises eleven chapters, lavish illustrations, and six tables that provide timelines, inventory references, and economic data. Chapter 1, "From the Street to the Studio," provides a vivid picture of the close-knit, insular world of Neapolitan painting in the first decades of the Seicento, with close connections among painters, gilders, sculptors, and carpenters. The line between artist and artisan, Marshall demonstrates, was far more fluid in Naples than in Rome, and, at the same time, artists were generally paid much less. Such close ties were the result not only of geographical proximity—most resided in the artists' quarter near the Palazzo Gravina—but also because many of them were related by blood or marriage. Outsiders who found success in Naples often did so by marrying into local artistic dynasties, as Ribera did by marrying the daughter of Giovanni Azzolino.

In chapter 2, "Altarpieces, Frescoes and the Larger Workshops, 1580–1620," Marshall demonstrates that the oft-cited Neapolitan preference for foreign artists "was not so much a deep-seated bias" but rather "highlights the critical gap created by the lack of a strong local school of fresco painting" (24). Artists focused instead on the local tradition of *soffitti cassettonati*—carved, gilt wooden ceilings enframing large oil paintings—reinforcing the collaborative, artisanal nature of Neapolitan art. At times the preference for foreign fresco painters led to violent conflict, most famously surrounding the city's most prestigious commission, the decoration of the vault of the Cappella del Tesoro di San Gennaro. It was not until the 1630s that Stanzione and his workshop developed the first viable local school of fresco painting. These trends are explored in chapter 3, "Stanzione, Ribera and the Years of Consolidation, 1620–56," which follows how Neapolitan painting began to come into its own with the rise of Ribera and Stanzione, whose large, well-organized workshops trained the next generation of

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Neapolitan painters. Stanzione's career in particular was "characteristic of this next phase of Neapolitan painting in that it developed largely in response to the new taste for Caravaggesque gallery paintings and altarpieces" (41). Nevertheless the two artists had differing approaches in training their followers. Stanzione's students maintained distinct artistic identities: Bernardo Cavallino, Annella de Rosa, and Agostino Beltrano are among the best known. Ribera's pupils, on the other hand, were meant to assimilate the master's style and were often charged with turning out lower-priced workshop pieces. Thus, works by Juan Dó, Giovanni Ricca, Hendrik van Somer, or even young Giordano could be nearly indistinguishable from those of the master. Ribera's pupil Aniello Falcone is the protagonist of chapter 4, "Aniello Falcone and the Rise of Neapolitan Cabinet Painting." One of the most important innovators and modernizers of painting in Naples, Falcone founded an *accademia*, or life-drawing studio, in 1636 that brought a new emphasis on *disegno* and on the human figure to Neapolitan art. Concurrently, Falcone began to turn to the independent cabinet picture, "diversifying his output into new sub-categories of production" (74), in a manner that appealed to the new collecting vogue among Neapolitan aristocrats. Most famous were Falcone's distinctive battle scenes, a genre that paved the way for the historical subjects and *vedute* of artists such as Andrea de Leone and Domenico Gargiulo.

Chapter 5, "Art Dealing at the Lower Levels of the Market," turns to the low-end *rivenditori*, or dealers in second-hand goods, who often employed artists in nearly sweatshop-like conditions to mass-produce cheap devotional works. Bernardo Cavallino and Salvator Rosa began their careers in such circumstances but were eventually able to strike out on their own. In Rome, the Accademia di San Luca officially discouraged painters from dealing in second-hand pictures, worried that it would undercut the market; in Naples, however, as chapter 6, "Dealing by Artists," shows, it was extremely common for artists to supplement their incomes through the sale of second-hand works. Some painters, such as Paolo Finoglio, Giacomo de Castro, and Francesco di Maria gained great prestige and wealth as connoisseurs and dealers. Meanwhile, as delineated in chapter 7, "The Rise of the Art Merchants," a new kind of picture-dealer began to emerge: wealthy, cosmopolitan entrepreneurs who took advantage of "a true luxury market for art based on a concomitant reach outward to new international markets for European painting" (138). The most famous of these merchant-collectors was the enormously prosperous Fleming Gaspar Roomer, one of the city's greatest tastemakers.

Chapter 8, "Public Commissions," considers the flood of altarpieces, frescoes, and decorative cycles commissioned as a result of the church-building boom in Counter-Reformation Naples. Caravaggio's altarpieces for Sant'Anna dei Lombardi and the Pio Monte della Misericordia marked just the beginning of an era of lavish ecclesiastic patronage that transformed the city's artistic landscape. The richness of the churches, often mentioned by local chroniclers, meant not only competition among religious orders—particularly the Theatines, Oratorians, and Jesuits—but also among the artists who sought their patronage. The wealthiest institution by far was the Carthusians' exquisite Certosa di San Martino, perched atop the Vomero hill, which became a virtual showroom for the artists whom the order favored.

As the Neapolitan nobility became increasingly accepting of their role as Hapsburg subjects, they sought to make visible their status through the construction of palaces, the commissioning of family chapels, and the collecting of art, as chapter 9, "Private Collections of Painting," illustrates. Although there were many wealthy foreign collectors in Naples, the Roomer collection was by far the grandest, and included works by Flemish artists, such as Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck, whose presence had a lasting impact on Neapolitan painting. A fascinating exception was the virulently anti-Hapsburg Archbishop of Naples, Ascanio Filomarino, whose patronage shunned local artists and instead reflected his Francophile and Rome-centric tastes. Chapter 10, "The Viceroy," explores the Spanish viceroys of Naples as patrons and collectors of Neapolitan painting. Given their typically short reigns, their mark on the city was fleeting. However, as intermediaries of the king and powerful figures in their home regions, they often had a profound effect on Spanish taste for Neapolitan art. Finally, chapter 11, "Public Exhibitions, Rivalry and the Internalization of Neapolitan Baroque Painting," tracks the newly triumphant spirit that infused Neapolitan art after the twin crises of the Revolt of Masaniello in 1647 and the devastating plague of 1656. Public competitions played a central role in public perceptions of artists and helped launch the careers of many Neapolitan painters. Among these, Luca Giordano, Francesco Solimena, and Paolo de Matteis ushered in a new, global appreciation of Neapolitan painting, from Florence and Madrid to Vienna and London.

Marshall's account effectively builds on the legacy of Francis Haskell, as well as more recent work by Richard Spear, Philip Sohm, and Patrizia Cavazzini that consider the socio-economic life of Baroque artists in Rome. Here one gets a vivid sense of the artists' struggle for recognition and remuneration. However, the reader is left pondering how the vibrant literary, scientific, theatrical, and musical culture of Naples might also fit into an understanding of Neapolitan painting in an equally nuanced way. But one must not underestimate the sheer difficulty of such an undertaking for Naples—as opposed to Rome, Bologna, Florence, or Venice, where much of the legwork has been done by previous scholars. Marshall is to be congratulated on creating a compelling framework that will be indispensable for all future study of Neapolitan Baroque art.

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