Rome 1629, ‘Pensieri ad Arte’ Series

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Noémi Duperron, Geneva

Roma 1629
edited by Jan Blanc & Marije Osnabrugge
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As (art) historians, we are used to thinking in terms of causality and long-term developments. Ever since Vasari, we attempt to establish a coherent, logical chronology of artistic production and identify a homogeneous character of art in a specific place and era (‘style’/’school’). This model of historical explanation, which suggests a continuous temporality and causality and is most often based on large general discourses uniformly applied to historical realities that are evidently more complex. For many years, it has been challenged, most of all by the proponents of microstoria, who favoured singularities over constants, exceptions over generalizations.

It is this way of thinking and writing art history that we propose to apply in this volume. In an attempt to ‘complicate’ our notion of artistic production, we will focus on a very limited time frame – a single year – in a clearly defined location – Rome – and describe what actually happened there and then, without looking at what had come before and in what it would result. With this series of micro-historical case studies, we want to do justice to the intricate nature of culture and art and provide new insights in artistic practice and theory.

In this context, the focus on Rome seems particularly relevant. Since the beginning of the Renaissance, Rome has been one of the main European artistic hubs, dense with artists and artisans attracted to the cultural and religious aura of ancient noble families and popes. Many artists from the different parts of Italy, and from other European countries, felt a desire or need to go there, to perfect their knowledge of ancient artworks and the great masters of the Renaissance, or to compete with the very best artists for the favour of the numerous religious and aristocratic patrons present in the Eternal City. The high density and, more significantly, the complexity of relationships between artists, scientists, scholars and patrons in the cultural and artistic centre that was early modern Rome, makes it nearly impossible to characterize a homogeneous ‘identity’ of the arts in Rome.

In this volume, we would like to provide, in about fifteen articles, a rich and contrasting portrait of the arts in Rome in 1629. This year offers several advantages. Roman artistic life in 1629 was marked by a great diversity of actors, both indigenous and foreign, in all fields of knowledge and the arts. Meanwhile, it does not correspond to any major event (e.g. election of a pope, a disaster, death of a major artist) in the Roman situation that could potentially dominate archives, testimonies and practices. Finally, in the historiography of Roman art, it is a kind of blind spot and, as

Caravaggism was on the decline since a long time, and the circles of Nicolas Poussin, Pietro da Cortona and Bernini had not yet fully imposed themselves. In short, it was a 'normal' year, which allows us to get a grasp of 'business as usual' in seventeenth-century Rome, with regard to (for example): artistic developments, workshop practices, art techniques, patronage and the art market, interaction between visual artists and authors, musicians and scientists.

Possible themes that may be discussed in this volume include, but are not limited to:

– What happened in the studio of a specific artist in Rome in 1629? Who was present in the workshop (assistants, pupils, models), which artworks were created?
– What happened in a specific Roman palazzo, in relation to art, in 1629: Which artworks were commissioned and bought, which building activity (renovations, garden architecture, etc.) took place, who lived there (artists, musicians, poets and other guests, as well as the owners) and which events took place?
– What happened, artistically, in a specific Roman church: Which artworks were commissioned, which clerics were in charge, who else was involved in the commission?
– Which specific artwork (building, painting, drawing, print, publication, poem, musical piece) was created in Rome in 1629? Which comparable artworks were created in the same year?
– Which actual encounters between the artists working at the same time in Rome took place in 1629? Where (in which neighbourhoods, or even in which houses) did they meet and under which circumstances (language, type of interaction, etc.)? What would they have discussed (technique, subjects or genres, personal affairs)?

The originality of this approach consists in the choice not to use this year as a pretext to reflect on the Roman 'context' in the 1620s and 1630s, but, to the contrary, to provide a precise analysis of the elaborate, contradicting and protean Roman artistic and cultural scene. In order to do so, we will ask all the authors to limit themselves exclusively to this year, selecting an artwork, an event, a text or an encounter. As such, the volume will also form a methodological exercise for contributors. The case studies that the contributors to this volume – upcoming and established experts from a variety of backgrounds – will select and discuss will illustrate the complexity of artistic life in the Eternal City in one year, rather than construct a homogeneous image of 'art in Rome' in 1629.

Practical guidelines:

Please submit your abstract (max. 300 words) and CV before 15 May 2019, to Jan Blanc (jan.blanc@unige.ch) and Marije Osnabrugge (marije.osnabrugge@unige.ch).

The editors will inform the selected authors of their decision by 15 June 2019. The deadline of the first version of the articles is 30 September 2019, after which the articles will be peer-reviewed.
Final versions are being due by December 23, 2019. Please take this schedule into account in your decision to submit a proposal.
The articles may be written in English, Italian, French and German and must be between 5000 and 8000 words (incl. footnotes).

If you have any questions regarding a potential subject, please contact the editors.

Reference:

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