

## MOSTRE, CONVEGNI E MUSEI

*“Natura ed espressione nell’arte bolognese-emiliana,,  
Bologna, Palazzo dell’Archiginnasio, 12 settembre-22 novembre 1970*

The Biennale at Bologna took a different direction in 1970. Instead of a monographic exhibition devoted to a Bolognese painter (Guido Reni, the Carracci, Guercino) or one exploring a given stylistic moment or problem (the Seicento in Bologna, ancient art in northern Italy, the classical ideal in the seventeenth century), the exhibition this year, prepared by Francesco Arcangeli, professor of art history at the University of Bologna, sought to illustrate a seven hundred year current in Emilian art, one distinct from the classical and academic tradition so closely associated in our minds with Bologna.

As Prof. Arcangeli states in his introduction to the catalogue, the exhibition is based on ideas he has presented in university lectures exploring the dramatic, emotional strain in Emilian art over the centuries. The scope of the exhibition is a large one: from Wiligelmo to Giorgio Morandi, including Vitale da Bologna, Jacopino da Francesco, Andrea da Bartoli, Amico Aspertini, Ludovico Carracci, and Giuseppe Maria Crespi. I can think of only one other instance in which the theme of a school over a period of time was presented: Roberto Longhi’s *Pittori della realtà*, an exhibition done in Milan in 1953 and covering a more restricted problem and area. There, Longhi set out to explore the concept of pictorial reality in about two hundred years of Bergamesque-Brescian painting with pictures, most of them portraits, from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries.

Prof. Arcangeli has chosen a more diffuse problem for if contact between Moroni and Ceruti is immediately apparent, it is not so obvious between Vitale and Giuseppe Maria Crespi, to take one possible example. The spectator who enters the Archiginnasio is confronted first with photographs of Wiligelmo’s sculpture at Modena, then with a chronological arrangement of pictures through Morandi, and finally by a resumé of all the periods in the last three rooms which contain the large altarpieces and detached frescoes. The visitor would certainly be enlightened and uplifted by the pictures shown, but, without the catalogue, he might well be hard put to explain why they were all shown together.

This is not to say that the selection is not an impressive one. Well known pictures are shown, but others come from private collections, and even more are known, but rather inaccessible, works. Ludovico Carracci’s *Assumption of the Virgin* from Raleigh, his *St. Carlo Borromeo Baptizing Children during the Plague* from Nonatentola, and a number of Giuseppe Maria Crespi’s pictures, particularly the *Latona Transforming Shepherds into Frogs*, a recent purchase of the Pinacoteca, belong in this latter category. They were all a joy to see.

Since early Italian painting is not my field, I shall

confine comments on the works exhibited to those after 1500.

No. 54. *Portrait of a Woman*. Not by Ludovico, though suggesting another attribution is difficult.

No. 65. *Sts. George and Catherine Led to their Deaths*. Very weak in many parts. One thinks of studio hands for the execution of the picture with the possible exception of the figure of St. Catherine.

Nos. 78, 79, 80. These three still lifes are closer to Jan Fyt than to Giuseppe Maria Crespi.

No. 90. As Prof. Arcangeli notes, this is connected to Antonio Crespi’s picture of the *Holy Family*, deposited by the Pinacoteca in S. Giovanni in Monte, Bologna. I think that the rather cold surfaces and the awkward drawing of the Christ Child would best be explained by giving this study to Antonio himself rather than to his father.

No. 91. *Dice Players*. Such crudeness is surprising if the picture is indeed by Giuseppe Maria.

However, an exhibition is more than a temporary assembling of pictures that one is glad to see and study individually, and, given this, Prof. Arcangeli’s catalogue becomes more than an added dimension to the exhibition; it is really its *raison d’être*. All the works shown are illustrated, documented, and discussed, but it is the long introductory essay which is the key to the exhibition. It is a strongly felt presentation of an idea that the core of Emilian, specifically Bolognese, art is not the classical-academic tradition, but the direct, intuitive, and emotional current illustrated at the Archiginnasio. Prof. Arcangeli supports his critical estimate of this facet of Bolognese painting by quotations from Malvasia and Longhi, and certainly nobody is going to deny the general validity of the Aspertini-Francia, Ludovico-Annibale, Crespi-Creti polarity. What is lacking is an explanation of how this current developed historically and what it means in the context of Italian painting. Such an undertaking would require a book, and this is perhaps the weakness of the whole project: an exhibition does not seem to be the best format for presenting Prof. Arcangeli’s ideas. For what we have is such a broad and complex subject that only a book — and a large and profusely illustrated one at that — could do it justice. With the pictures in the Archiginnasio, we have actual illustrations to an essay, one by necessity so condensed that following the arguments often requires an act of faith. What one would have like to have seen, literally as well as figuratively, is the presentation of a more restricted topic — Ludovico Carracci to Giuseppe Maria Crespi for example — which would have allowed a more unified, precise visual and critical exploration of many of the concepts that Prof. Arcangeli has put forth.

NANCY WARD NEILSON

303