



## Ventra, Stefania. L'Accademia di San Luca nella Roma del Secondo Seicento: Artisti, opere, strategie culturali

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Volume 31, numéro 2, automne 2020

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1100128ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.33137/confrat.v31i2.38078>

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Éditeur(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

1180-0682 (imprimé)

2293-7579 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Hughes-Johnson, S. (2020). Compte rendu de [Ventra, Stefania. L'Accademia di San Luca nella Roma del Secondo Seicento: Artisti, opere, strategie culturali]. *Confraternitas*, 31(2), 143–145. <https://doi.org/10.33137/confrat.v31i2.38078>

catacombs after the rediscovery of the subterranean city in the sixteenth century” (157). Two specific aspects can be identified in this process: a “devotional” approach to relics and a tendency to accumulate them without any particular distinction. Both these attitudes are part of a “strategy of sacralisation of confraternal spaces” (190).

In the last chapter, Serra focuses on the history of the Archconfraternity of the Stigmata of St. Francis, showing how it was established and evolved in Rome, and how its success among different social groups reveals the intensity and fluidity of its religious experience. In this perspective, the archconfraternity proves to be an important factor in the development of “both horizontal and vertical social relations,” presenting itself as a “testing ground for the members of the city’s religious elites [...] more demanding and eager to follow a path of Christian life, rooted in an ascetic spirituality with a strongly Christocentric tone” (242).

After two appendices, one consisting of eight topographical maps and the other of a list of confraternities in Rome, the volume ends with a conclusion in which Serra stresses the role of confraternities in the history of piety, “a privileged observatory of religious sensibility and devotional choices” (244) over the course of time. To quote from Dompnier’s preface, Serra’s text “stands out for the richness of its information on religious life in Rome as well as for the originality of its approach to modern Catholicism” (vi).

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**Ventra, Stefania.** *L’Accademia di San Luca nella Roma del Secondo Seicento: Artisti, opere, strategie culturali*. Quaderni sull’Età e la Cultura del Barocco, 2. Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2020. xlv, 370 + 171 plates, 90 ill. ISBN 978-88-222-6682-8 (paperback) €55.

From its unapologetic introduction, Stefania Ventra’s investigation into the artists, work, and cultural strategies of the Accademia di San Luca seeks to overturn the misconception that the academy represented a fortress of Classicism in terms of artistic philosophy and praxis, a space where Roman academic traditions of the seventeenth century stood in direct opposition to the Baroque, with the former being the predominant didactic, dictated by the institution.

An ancient and important organisation, primarily concerned with the education of young artists, but with a confraternal branch and various devolved powers that extended into the city’s civic sphere, the academic culture of the Accademia di San Luca, from Ventra’s perspective,

“cannot be interpreted according to stylistic or ideological connotations” (xliii; my translation). Notwithstanding the institution’s great impact on the figurative arts, the notion of a succession of great men ordaining an homogenised Classical manifesto to compliant members is deftly toppled as Ventra delves beyond the individuals who directed San Luca and explores the critical roles of students, secretaries, and estimators: all of whom contributed to the proprietary reputation of the academy.

Through the skilful and scrupulous intertextual analysis of visual and literary documents, Ventra works both chronologically and thematically, examining the membership lists and registers of the academy, as well as the artistic output of its members between 1662 and 1702.

Beyond the usual introductory chapters, the study is organised into two main parts and includes three appendices detailing the *elenchi* and *registri* produced by the academy between the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

The first portion of the study begins with a comparison of the “artistic strategies and cultural practices” (1; my translation) of the academy during the 1660s and 1670s and then moves on to investigate various movements within and without the institution, including the influence of Parisian academic culture upon its Roman equivalent. Beginning with portraits donated to the academy by Carlo Maratti (1625–1730), Ventra uses these renderings to illustrate the diversity of creative character inherent in the artworks and in turn, within the academy. Concentrating also on the year 1664, a period that saw the appointment of Maratti as *principe* of the academy, Ventra contextualises the debate between Maratti and Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613–1696) and reveals the exercise as an advertisement of the institution’s activities. Furthermore, this section clarifies the hierarchical position of the various artistic forms within the institutional psyche and explores the internal, regulated competitions between members. Further still, the investigation elucidates the institutional privileges that fellows benefitted from. The final subsection of this portion of the volume explores the legacy of Pietro da Cortona (1596–1669) and the associated machinations concerning the academy’s “co-ownership” (117; my translation) of the church of Santi Luca e Martina, that followed the artist’s death.

The second part of the volume is dedicated to the role of the academy as a proponent of contemporary Roman art. Accordingly, the first two sub-sections introduce fresh, innovative detail on how the institution fared under the influence of its newly-appointed permanent secretary, Giuseppe Ghezzi (1634–1721). Ghezzi not only carved out his own position within the academy, using their statutes to strengthen his hand, but also dealt with increasing artistic competition from France as the *Seicento* drew to a close. Ventra continues her scrutiny of Ghezzi’s activities to include his undertakings outside of the institution and skilfully connects the

secretary's associations and actions to the legacy of Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680). Accordingly, Ghezzi's engagements within the academy suggest that he was not in favour of the unquestioning adoption of Maratti's philosophical and stylistic canon. Furthermore, the secretary's connections outside of the institution (especially with Queen Cristina of Sweden, who was renowned for her eclectic taste in art and her support of Bernini), indicates that Ghezzi was an advocate of stylistic diversity.

Ventra concludes the monograph by bringing together the various strands of discussion in order to view them in light of a tripartite treatise written by Lodovico Antonio David (1648–after 1709). David's discourse criticized the Accademia di San Luca's educational programs and the wider artistic traditions of Classicism and blamed the decline in "academic hegemony" (196; my translation) on the rejection of Raphael Santi's style in favour of modern or foreign artists. This criticism, when examined in light of what was actually occurring at the academy at the time, works to illuminate the "academic action" (197; my translation) that was taken, in order to assert the value of contemporary Roman *Seicento* artworks and academic culture during the ongoing antagonism between ancient and modern, Roman and foreign.

Ventra's final paragraph reiterates and affirms the premise of the introduction. Rather than exemplifying an unquestioning reliance on Classicism and upholding the polarised notion of the antique versus the contemporary, the stability of Classicism versus the drama of Baroque, the concept of a consolidated, institutional stylistic canon is rejected and replaced with a multifarious perception of artistic expression. Accordingly, Ventra concludes that the Accademia di San Luca took in those things that would make it strong. Without fear of contrast, the institution retained the teachings of Classical antiquity that existed alongside modernity. Furthermore, it was strengthened by the diverse skills and artistic proclivities of its members and became reinvigorated by the roles assumed by hitherto anonymous players.

Given the volume's necessary reliance on a variety of rich evidential sources and the original and skilful manner in which they are utilised, Stefania Ventra's *L'Accademia di San Luca nella Roma del Secondo Seicento: Artisti, opera, strategie culturali* will be an essential resource in the study of Early Modern academies and an indispensable reference for those pursuing the age-old, continuing debate surrounding how these and other similar institutions dealt with coalescing past and present.

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