

**Leopold D. Ettlinger, *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*. Oxford, Phaidon Press, 1978. 183 pp., 162 illus., \$90.00**

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My criticisms of this volume are only two and minor. The first is that a map of the whole area to which the fascicule is dedicated would have been helpful. Secondly, after each catalogue entry, which is amply spaced and in large type, there follow the bibliography, observations, and dating, all in densely-packed small print, sometimes continuing for two pages with barely a change of paragraph, and little or no indication of where bibliography ends and observations begin. But the minor irritation this causes is quickly assuaged by the enormous amount of information so tightly packed into this space.

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LEOPOLD D. ETTLINGER *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*. Oxford, Phaidon Press, 1978. 183 pp., 162 illus., \$90.00

Antonio Pollaiuolo stands out as a leading contributor to the investigation of the depiction of landscape and the human figure in the last half of the quattrocento. Probably trained as a goldsmith, Antonio became the head of a workshop which executed works in a variety of media, including sculpture, painting, engraving, and jewellery. On several occasions he collaborated with his younger, less talented, brother Piero, who was trained as a painter. The work of these two brothers has presented art historians with a variety of problems, particularly in attribution, where their respective contributions to joint projects have remained elusive. Dating has also posed difficulties, since few firmly established dates exist, and the changing media of the Pollaiuoli's *œuvre* have made it difficult to determine chronological sequence.

While the Pollaiuoli have been the subject of numerous studies in the last half-century, including several Italian monographs, Leopold Ettlinger's new book is the first major work in English since Maud Cruttwell's study of 1907. In his preface, Ettlinger states three goals of his work: to reassess the extent of

the brothers' output, to reconsider the artists within their era, and to re-examine the works of Piero. The evolution of the Pollaiuoli's work is traced in an introductory, unfootnoted essay. A critical catalogue includes further discussion of individual works as well as measurements, provenance, documents (in both the original language and in translation), and sources.

The author begins with a brief biographical survey in which he examines the various records – tax returns, Vasari's *Vite*, and earlier accounts – to trace the brothers' lives. He stresses Antonio's role as a goldsmith and designer in various media and Piero's career as a painter, working to his own designs or in collaboration with his brother. Touching on themes he will subsequently pursue in greater detail, Ettlinger notes the difficulties in attribution caused by the close collaboration of the brothers. He suggests that while Piero was less famous and talented, given the nature of the commissions he received, he still enjoyed a considerable standing in his time.

Ettlinger's Antonio, a 'bright, open-eyed artist of his period,' found inspiration in the older Gothic tradition and in the new realism of Renaissance Florence. This stylistic mingling is evident in his early metalwork and the twenty-seven embroidery designs from the life of St. John the Baptist for a set of church vestments. On the basis of their stylistic and comprehensive narrative qualities, Ettlinger argues for viewing the embroidery designs not in the context of decorative art but of quattrocento painting, specifically the monumental fresco cycles of Uccello, Gozzoli, and Filippo Lippi. Ettlinger's point is well made, as Antonio's designs, whether for embroidery, sculpture, or painting, have the capacity of being expanded or reduced without losing any of their power. At the same time, given the placement of the embroideries on church vestments, the luxurious qualities of these pieces cannot be denied.

Disagreeing with earlier scholarship, Ettlinger places the designs in two different time periods and gives them all to Antonio. His contention that differences in quality in the designs are due to execution by assistants and not to the assistants'

intervening in the design process is cogent. Increasingly, we realize that a cycle of this sort, whether embroidery, sculpture, or mural painting, is the result of a co-operative effort, and any attribution to a master necessarily implies the participation of assistants. In the case of the embroideries, the fabrication of the pieces by embroidery-workers does not eliminate the right of the designing artist to his work.

Another question relevant to understanding how workshops functioned is the use of patterns or motifs, whether compositions or single figures, in various works and at different stages of an artist's career. Ettlinger provides a detailed and workmanlike discussion of artistic formulae and stock models in the Pollaiuoli workshop, such as the similar arrangement of figures in the two small panel paintings of *Hercules and the Hydra* and *Hercules and Anteus* in the Uffizi, the bronze group of *Hercules and Anteus* in the Bargello, and, presumably, the lost *Hercules* paintings for the Medici. Another major example is the figures of the *Virtues* first seen in the plaques of the silver reliquary cross for the Florentine baptistery which recur with slight variations in Piero's paintings of the *Virtues* for the Mercanzia and again in the reliefs of the same subject on the two papal tombs of Sixtus IV and Innocent VIII.

Ettlinger's conclusion that the famous engraving of the *Battle of the Ten Nudes* is an elaborate example of a model sheet is likely to prove more controversial. Pattern sheets usually recorded single, often unconnected motifs in order to preserve and transmit those images. While the systematic posing of the figures in the engraving has certain general similarities to earlier examples of model sheets, the integrated actions of the figures, the unusually large size of the print, its highly finished background, and its signature all argue against its being a pattern sheet. As well, Antonio's juxtaposition and reversal of figures are due to his detailed, systematic observation of the human body in action. Nor are they uncommon in mid-fifteenth-century art as witnessed by his own painting of the *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* and works by Andrea del Castagno and Piero della Frances-

ca. We must continue to seek the explanation of this puzzling image, particularly its subject.

More convincing links are made by the author between the print and Leon Battista Alberti's recommendation in his *Treatise and Sculpture* that sculptors 'draw the contours of bodies whenever their appearance changes with various positions, whenever bending or tension of the limbs changes, as happens with figures standing, sitting, lying or turning to the side.' Similar influences from Alberti's *Treatise on Painting* are found in the *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* in the treatment of light and landscape and in the 'composition' of the painting, particularly the accuracy, appropriateness, and variety of the rendering of the human figures.

Piero remains elusive. On the one hand, Ettliger argues for a higher appreciation of the quality of Piero's work, whether in collaboration with Antonio, as in the *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*, or in works completely by him, such as the *Coronation of the Virgin* in St. Gimignano (in the church of S. Agostino, not the Collegiata, as the author has it). Yet he ultimately concludes that the close collaboration of the two brothers makes it difficult to determine individual shares.

In the case of the *Mercanzia Virtues* by Piero, Ettliger's attempt to give the drawing of Charity on the back of the panel painting of the same figure to Piero is not credible, neither on stylistic grounds nor on the basis of documentary evidence, the primary basis of Ettliger's argument. The drawing is of superior quality to the painting and has long been given by virtually all scholars to Antonio. The *Deliberazioni* of the *Mercanzia* describe a 'figure and image of Charity which is painted or drawn on the wall of the meeting place,' hardly a clear reference to the drawing on the wooden panel.

The last section of the book takes up the two papal tombs of Sixtus IV and Innocent VIII, ground which Ettliger had partly covered in an earlier, detailed article on the former monument. Once again, his concern is to place the artists in their contemporaneous artistic context, and to assess the importance of earlier models, here the *Mercanzia Virtues*. Again the collaboration of the two brothers is seen to be too

close to warrant division into separate hands.

Ettliger is only partly successful in fulfilling his three goals. He succeeds well in placing the Pollaiuoli in their contemporary artistic context. The discussion of the practices of the Pollaiuoli workshop is very useful for our understanding of the functioning of Florentine *botteghe*. Piero remains a shadowy figure, although one whose work is claimed to be of higher quality than previously acknowledged. Several significant areas are given scanty attention. Antonio's contribution to the representation of the human figure requires further analysis of his treatment of anatomy, a field most recently explored by Laurie Smith Fusco. Technical features of an artist's work, increasingly a concern of art historians, are important to the study of Antonio's works, as he made fundamental advances in painting, drawing, and engraving techniques. His use of oil glazes was significant to the effects of light in his panoramic landscapes, and his developments in outline and modelling systems in graphic techniques were essential to his rendering of the form and musculature of the human figure.

While a new English text on the Pollaiuoli was needed, this book remains uneven in its treatment of the two artists. Its high price unfortunately places it out of the reach of many interested students of Renaissance art.

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LILLIAN BROWSE *Forain the Painter, 1852-1931*. Londres, Paul Elek, 1978. 193 p., 86 illus., \$29.95.

Forain ne semble pas encore sorti du purgatoire. Peut-être est-ce la rançon d'une gloire excessive qui marque ses dernières années, et qui paraît essentiellement fondée sur son œuvre de caricaturiste, voire de graveur. Sans être ignoré, son nom n'est jamais prononcé qu'en passant dans les histoires de la peinture. Si l'ouvrage que lui consacre L. Browse n'est pas « la première étude de Forain comme peintre », ainsi que le prétend la jaquette, il

n'en a pas moins le mérite de combler une lacune et de révéler l'intérêt, l'importance et la continuité (contrairement à ce que l'on a souvent écrit) d'une activité picturale encore mal connue.

Certes, Forain n'apparaît pas comme une étoile de première grandeur. Mais l'on sait aujourd'hui que l'intérêt d'une étude historique ne réside pas seulement dans la qualité de l'œuvre étudiée. Et s'il faut louer L. Browse d'avoir su résister à la tentation de l'hagiographie, qui guette toute monographie, on ne saurait dire qu'elle échappe à tous les pièges du genre. C'est ainsi que le tissu d'anecdotes qui parsème les biographies antérieures et constitue ce que l'on pourrait nommer la « légende dorée » de Forain est ici repris sans aucune distance critique. Un exemple caractéristique : le récit des débuts (p. 13) qui met en œuvre une série de ces « topoi » de type vasarien qu'ont brillamment analysés E. Kris et O. Kurz dans *Die Legende vom Künstler* (Vienne, 1934) et dont l'intérêt est beaucoup plus idéologique que documentaire. Plutôt que de transcrire la tradition sans s'interroger sur sa fonction publicitaire, il eût été plus fructueux d'en tenter l'analyse, pour mettre en évidence le caractère typique d'une carrière dont le profil, tel qu'il nous est transmis par les premiers biographes de Forain, apparaît comme l'illustration exemplaire d'un mythe bien daté, celui de l'ascension sociale qui conduit l'artiste de la bohème de sa jeunesse au succès mondain. Car l'intérêt de cette vie, et celui, par là même, de sa fortune critique (ici fort mal exploitée), c'est aussi de suggérer, dans une évolution que résume un réseau d'amitiés qui va de Rimbaud à Pétain, une explication de l'orientation curieusement rétrograde du développement stylistique de Forain, que Browse a bien stigmatisé (p. 12 et 44) sans pourtant parvenir à en rendre compte.

Tant par sa gamme formelle que dans son éventail thématique, la peinture de Forain témoigne d'une réceptivité peu commune, qui en fait un véritable révélateur des courants artistiques ambiants. Bien documenté, l'ouvrage de Browse s'attache à expliciter ces liens multiples, et l'on y trouvera quelques perspectives nouvelles, comme le