

Pier Francesco Mola (1612 - 1666)

materia e colore nella pittura del '600

Pascoli's biography of Pier Francesco Mola (Coldrerio, Canton Ticino 1612 – Rome 1666) begins emphatically, recalling the fame the Swiss-Roman artist achieved in life and the esteem he enjoyed among the leading personalities of the time: 'Among the best professors... perhaps none have been so generously recognised and nobly treated by any sovereign as he was.' The historian recalls how Innocent X supported his canvas as he painted, Alexander VII permitted him the honour of keeping his head covered in his presence and Cristina of Sweden bid him enter her carriage, while Louis XIV went as far as offering him an annual income of six thousand scudi if only he would move to Paris. The favour he enjoyed from the Pamphilj during the pontificate of Innocent X (1644-1655) and the Chigi in the reign of Alexander VII (1655-1667), the protection of Cristina of Sweden, as well as the commissions he received from among the most prominent noble houses (Costaguti, Colonna, Omodei) are effective evidence of the consensus Mola managed to secure in Rome from about 1650 up to the end of his life, which culminated in 1662, with his election as prince of the Accademia di San Luca. The flower painter Abraham Brueghel, testifies in a number of letters to prince Antonio Ruffo to the myth of Mola. On the 22 May 1665 he wrote that among all the painters active in Rome 'Carluccio [Maratta] and Mola are the most highly esteemed' and after Mola's death, on the 20 November 1670, he laconically declared 'here his reputation is that of first Painter in Italy'.

His vast studio, the considerable quantity of copies after his works that still circulate in the market, are present in public and private collections and the influence he exerted on generations of painters into the nineteenth century, are a clear reflection of the uninterrupted success of his achievement as a painter. Mola was certainly one of the least orthodox artists among the varied ranks of the Roman Baroque. His ambition was to assert himself as a complete artist. He not only worked in the most prestigious creative sphere of history painting, but also in what some circles considered lesser genre, like landscape and portrait painting. The great modernity of Mola's painting is demonstrated by the fact that Delacroix advised his pupils to make copies after his works. Mola's painting carries an impressionist force, played out through his Guercino-inspired, neo-Venetian use of colour: his creation of pictorial effects a *macchia* appear to anticipate the realist painters of the nineteenth century.

After Richard Cocke's now amply surpassed monograph of 1972, the exhibitions in Rome and Lugano, 1989-1990, and at Ariccia, 2005, have recorded significant progress in studies on Mola; they have also revealed new information on his studio and pupils as well as on the significant extent of the master's influence both on landscape and figure painting. Scholars have therefore long awaited an up-to-date monograph on the artist, that brings together the results of recent research and highlights Mola's pivotal role as an undisputed protagonist of seventeenth century European art.

Monograph divided into sections: - Introductory study Catalogue: - Portraits - Figure subjects (subsections: philosophers and men of letters; religious subjects; anomalous subjects; character studies) - Landscapes - Altarpieces - Frescoes - Dubious or refused works - Documented lost works