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Ed. Sheila Schwartz

Jonathan Locke Hart

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[See table of contents](#)

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Steinberg, Leo.***Renaissance and Baroque Art: Selected Essays.* Ed. Sheila Schwartz.**

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. Pp. 416 + 104 colour plates, 140 halftones. ISBN 978-0-226-66886-4 (hardcover) US\$65.

Leo Steinberg is a treasure for visual and verbal artists and critics. Sheila Schwartz, the editor, has done a wonderful job with this project. This is one of five beautiful volumes of Steinberg's writing about art, and the University of Chicago Press should be commended. In the Preface, Schwartz says aptly of Steinberg: "The primacy of the visual is a credo of Steinberg's thinking about art" (viii). In the Introduction, Stephen J. Campbell confirms that Steinberg thought that critics and historians tended to rely on the textual over the visual (xi). Campbell observes Steinberg's "nondogmatic approach to the analysis of Baroque art" (xii). He sees Steinberg as a scholar of metaphor, so central to Aristotle's *Poetics* and book 3 of *Rhetoric* and so central to mimesis in poetry and visual art (xiv). As Campbell says, although Steinberg avoided the words "iconography" and "iconology," he is an outstanding iconologist (xv). Campbell speculates that the pastness of Steinberg's essays allows an opening "to the questions that they raise" (xvi).

Steinberg has a wide range of allusion to arts and culture. In the first essay, "Words That Prevent Perception," he begins with Shakespeare's sonnet 66, which telescopes what he abhors: "And art made tongue-tied by authority" (1). Steinberg glosses this verse in a specific time and place where he had grown up and fled. He describes how in 1933, when Josef Goebbels ordered orchestras to purge all non-Aryan musicians, Wilhelm Furtwangler, a conductor, advocated for the autonomy of art from politics, but Goebbels corrected him. As Steinberg paraphrases, "art either serves the cause or serves the enemy, its supposed autonomy being mere delusion" (1). This is a cautionary tale and Steinberg makes this connection explicit: "This, it seems to me, is the legacy now spreading around, so that, potentially, any work of art may become somebody's enemy—and incur the appropriate treatment" (1). Ideology and politics affect the reception and use of art.

Steinberg's first essay provides examples, including a mahogany carving by an American artist Allan Clark: *The King's Temptress*, which was offered for acquisition to the Fogg Museum in 1994 and rejected for political and social and

not artistic reasons, namely, for Orientalism and sexism (2). Steinberg discusses this issue in relation to sculpture in ancient Greece and by Michelangelo and says: “So I proceed as if questions touching the relation of text to image in the high art of the West really mattered” (3). Steinberg makes his criticism personal or biographical: “Begin with my first text-image experience. I was twelve, living with my Russian-émigré family in Berlin, having escaped from Communist Moscow in the winter of 1923” (3). The artist is human—Steinberg has told about some of Clark’s life in Asia, before showing the human side of himself. Aptly, Steinberg provides this background focused on the matter at hand. In a bookshop in 1932, he saw *Die Früh-Renaissance der italienischen Malerei* (1909), with fifty pages of text by Richard Hamann and two hundred full-page gray-and-white reproductions of paintings by artists with names like Pollaiuolo. The text did not interest the young Steinberg, but “I was instantly gripped by these pictures and couldn’t stop looking, from that day to this” (4). Text and image informed the life and work of Steinberg. Contra Walter Benjamin on the distancing of viewers from original works of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, Steinberg returns to himself at twelve, concluding “that the aura of an art work is born in enchantment and nourished by reverence” (4).

Steinberg explores at length the relation between word and image. For instance, he observes: “But language can’t help itself, being sequential; and for this failing was scoffed at by Leonardo da Vinci” (21). Steinberg prompts thought through observations about particular artists and their art and about artists and art generally. He generalizes: “To the Renaissance artist it’s all glissando, all measurably emplaced in the continuity of the flow. Because the integrative energy of Renaissance art flows from a mode of cognition ruled by the eye as the outpost of mind” (21–22). Steinberg asks us to look at Cubist pictures rather than through books as Marshall McLuhan does (33). For Steinberg, writers on art “substitute written texts for looking” because reading a text is faster and easier than looking at a picture, which “moves perpetually in its stillness, just takes too long” (33).

The second essay includes Steinberg’s intriguing discussion of Andrea Mantegna’s oculus of the Camera Picta, 1465–1474, which I have examined elsewhere, and stresses “Mantegna’s invention of the close-up” (55, see also 53–54). Steinberg asks a central question: “why are art historians so intent on putting this most independent artist of genius in debt to a theorist? Is it because

painting is too unlike their own practice?" (69). The third essay offers reflections on Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* (72). Steinberg observes once more that painters define painting: "Lippi, like Leon Battista Alberti, would have held to the view that the manifestations of light, and they alone, define the painter's true province" (86). In the fourth essay, Steinberg sees in Mantegna's dead Christ a coincidence of passion and pattern, corpse and mystical sign (96). The fifth essay looks at Pontormo's work in the Capponi Chapel in Santa Felicita, Florence, calling attention to justice becoming grace, "the mystery of Pontormo's program for the Capponi Chapel," and maintaining that his altarpiece that stirs "our spirits without much of this being known is the greater mystery of his art" (97, 110). Art is mysterious. The sixth essay examines Pontormo's *Alessandro de' Medici* and asks: "Why then does Pontormo portray the ruler of Florence engrossed in drawing?" (115). In the seventh essay, Steinberg analyzes Salviati's *Beheading of St. John the Baptist* and concludes: "Perhaps after all Salviati heard both strains of the counterpoint when he cast his central figure in the Michelangelesque attitude of a man reaching deep" (124). Steinberg sees religious images in deep ways.

In the eighth essay, Steinberg looks at El Greco's "small multiformed *Entombment* of which at present four versions are known" ... "as a manifesto" that provokes (125, 129). The ninth essay claims that "The Cerasi Chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome (fig. 9.1), is justly celebrated for three paintings—two Caravaggios on the side walls and, between them, a Carracci *Assumption*" (131) and observes: "the Cornaro Chapel seems like a grandiose transposition in sculpture of Caravaggio's intuition" (143). In the tenth essay, Steinberg discusses Guercino's *Saint Petronilla*, which he describes as a "colossal altarpiece for St. Peter's" and argues that Guercino was "an *intelligent* genius" (145, 161). Concentrating on Jan Steen's painting *The Drawing Lesson*, the eleventh essay speaks about "Steen's way of mapping the ineluctable" (163, 172). The twelfth seeks to decipher Velazquez's *Old Woman Cooking Eggs* and calls it "pictorial thinking of a high order" (181, 185). Steinberg focuses on *The Water Carrier* of Velazquez in the thirteenth essay and maintains: "The picture enacts the ages of man, and its secret grandeur is the totality whose end reaches to the beginning" (187). The fourteenth concentrates on Velazquez's *Pablo de Valladolid* and says of the figure of the actor: "I surround him in shared attention" (194). Velazquez's *Las Meninas* is the subject of the fifteenth essay, and the sixteenth includes a comparison of the representation of the horse in John Trumbull

(1790), Robert Strange after Van Dyck (1782), and Titian and his workshop (1559) (210–13, 234–35). Steinberg shows great depth and range in discussing visual art in eloquent words.

JONATHAN LOCKE HART

Shandong University

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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, 2020. Pp. xliv, 370 + 161 ill. ISBN 978-8-8222-6682-8 (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 organization, 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; all translations here are mine). Notwithstanding the institution's great impact on the figurative arts, the notion of a succession of great men ordaining a homogenized 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.