American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS)

Giambattista Tiepolo: Master of the Oil Sketch. Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas. 18 September - 12 December 1993. by Beverly Louise Brown

Review by: Beth S. Wright

Eighteenth-Century Studies, Vol. 27, No. 3 (Spring, 1994), pp. 483-487


Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2739366

Accessed: 17/03/2014 21:53

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

The Johns Hopkins University Press and American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (ASECS) are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to Eighteenth-Century Studies.
The fourth section, entitled *Le Temps de la Phrénologie*, suggests the web of interconnections between psychology, physical gestures, and facial expressions. In 1798 Franz-Joseph Gall, a Viennese doctor, proposed a theory for the functioning of the brain. The exhibition displays Gall’s treatise, along with Félix Vicq d’Azyr’s models of the dissected brain. These developments in neuroscience are compared to the earlier artistic investigations into physiognomy richly illustrated by Charles LeBrun’s drawings for his *Traité des expressions* (1678). The evolution of the relationships between psychology and art is further demonstrated with drawings and paintings by Greuze, David, Gericault, and Courbet.

The fifth and final section under review, *Évolution and Symétrie*, establishes the fundamental role of the Jardin des Plantes for the dissemination of natural history and, in particular, for the theories of evolution. Illustrations from Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle de L’homme* and Jean Baptiste de Lamarck’s *Philosophie zoologique* are shown with Georges Cuvier’s detailed drawings after fossils. More than the preceding ones, this section is a backdrop for the transition to the nineteenth-century setting, the stage for Charles Darwin.

Briefly evoking part of *L’âme au corps* does not do justice to the wealth of materials displayed, nor to the meticulous and inventive installation that carefully guide the visitor with informative labels and ingenious lighting through the sprawling space. The 560-page catalogue with 530 illustrations will surely promote a lively exchange among historians of art and science and invite them to emulate Enlightenment science in bridging the gaps between the two disciplines.

**ASECS**

1. Colloquia were held in June at the Jardin des Plantes and the Musée du Louvre to commemorate the bicentennial of these institutions. In addition, the Grand Louvre project, which started in 1983 and will terminate in 1996, opened a new wing and exhibition spaces on 18 November 18 1993. The Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, which was actually founded in 1794, is currently undergoing massive restoration and will open to the public in 1994.


Beverly Brown’s interest in Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770) was aroused when she was on the curatorial staff of the National Gallery in Washington
and witnessed the restoration of *The World Pays Homage to Spain* (1762). When in 1990 she moved to the Kimbell, which owns two important Tiepolo sketches, her first suggestion for an exhibition was this one, uniting 63 *modelli* (oil sketches preliminary to the final projects) and *ricordi* (kept as studio records). The function of these 63 works, therefore, ranges from working out a preliminary idea, to working up a presentation piece for the patron, to keeping a studio record of the final version from which, in turn, new projects could be born.

Because Tiepolo’s field was decorative painting, his works present essential difficulties, since they unify disparate media and evolve to maximize each medium’s and scale’s potential. The show frequently allows us to understand the artist’s conceptual development toward a composition by comparing a work’s final version with its preliminary drawings and oil sketches and by showing alternate treatments of the same subject in self-sufficient works, as well as different preliminary versions of the same work. The exhibit also makes possible the transformation of two-dimensional painting into a three-dimensional skin for architecture, as when we compare the *modello* for *Phaeton and Apollo* (c. 1729, Gemäldegalerie der Akademie, Vienna) with the *ricordi* (c. 1731, L.A. County Museum) of the final work in the Palazzo Archinto, Milan, unfortunately destroyed. But this brings up the missing link: the fresco itself. In an ideal world, we would travel to each site and place the drawings, preparatory oil models, and final pictorial versions next to us. Then, looking up at the billowing vaults, we could finally begin to understand the sumptuous ebullience of a ceiling fresco like *Apollo and the Four Continents* (1739). It is the Kimbell’s triumph to have gone as far as it has toward satisfying these impossible demands.

Beverly Brown and the Kimbell have done their utmost to assist the spectator and the armchair viewer, not only in the beautifully selected works, but in the catalog, a model of meticulous scholarship making this significant enterprise more permanent. In it, Brown writes on the “prima idea,” Pignatti on eighteenth-century Venetian painting, Ferrari on the oil sketch in Italy before Tiepolo, and Longyear on the artist’s paint handling and color. The exhibition was also inaugurated with a one-day symposium, with lectures on Tiepolo’s Russian projects of the 1740s (George Knox, University of British Columbia), on his period at the Spanish court from 1762 to the end of his life (Catherine Whistler, the Ashmolean Museum), on the evolution of his projects for the Venetian churches and the Scuola Grande dei Carmini (William Barcham, the Fashion Institute of Technology), on his orientation of composition according to the direction and quality of the site’s light (Michael Baxandall, University of California at Berkeley), on his original interpretation of narrative modes (Svetlana Alpers, University of California at Berkeley), and on the expressiveness of his flickering chiaroscuro (Philip Sohm, University of
Toronto). Thus, the works on exhibit were set into their larger context of patron, site, and interpretive evolution.

An exhibition of works relating to architectural decorative projects assumes considerable background knowledge, for the works insist on being understood in their eventual site. This is most evident in the modelli and ricordi for ceilings. Modern viewers are not accustomed to reading compositions vertically and diagonally as well as laterally. Even more rarely are they asked to reread the same composition from opposing angles, as if it were a visual rebus. But the eighteenth-century patron living under these ceilings would insist on figures that could be read from virtually any angle. This puts extreme demands on pose, placement, and presentation, and the solutions sometimes appear bewildering in a small-scale sketch, as in the foreshortened Saint Roch (Saint Roch in Glory, c. 1742, Yale Art Gallery).

The site’s spatial configuration and lighting conditions exerted great influence on the evolving compositions, as both Barcham and Baxandall stressed in their lectures and as the correspondence surrounding the Palazzo Canossa’s Triumph of Hercules (Verona, c. 1761; destroyed 1945) makes plain. Tiepolo’s modello is a precious record (Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire) of this lost work. But light must be understood as a quality, as well as a direction: the orientation of windows, the difference between diffused and reflected light, all affected Tiepolo’s compositions. Furthermore, these decorations were inserted into even more complex systems, which unified fresco with stucco, colored marble, and other materials. These could be in another style, as Whistler pointed out; in the Palacio Real, Tiepolo’s frescoes were surrounded by Pellegrini’s Spanish chinoiserie. Success depended on the delicate balance of visual forces, which united Tiepolo’s works with the rest of the room. This is seen in sudden darkness at the edges of ceiling modelli, in which almost brutally foreshortened figures throw arms or legs over the entablature marking the meeting point of the ceiling and wall. Tiepolo’s achievement is that these material concerns are not only satisfied but placed in the service of inventive allegorical conception. From the placement and coloration of the figures to the quality of paint that touches them into being, every visual aspect serves meaning. Tiepolo’s approach to narrative tends toward free interpretation rather than illustration of action, and meaning scintillates, in decorative projects, across the room from work to work.

The spontaneity and fluency of Tiepolo’s paint is a constant joy, not only because we can savor it indirectly, but because it is so expressively adaptable. Longyear, in her discussion of Tiepolo’s brushwork, traces his development from his early tenebroso sculptural style to his more concise scumbling. The controlled construction of bodily forms with smooth strokes, overlaid with delicate lines that add details of highlights and
materials, as in *The Meeting of Anthony and Cleopatra* (c. 1746, National Galleries of Scotland, Edinburgh) is followed by bravura combination of wet-in-wet painting with calligraphic overdrawing, seen in the late period, as in *The World Pays Homage to Spain* (1762, National Gallery of Art, Washington). We must wonder, however, how this fluency translated to fresco. Not only was fresco a collaborative creation of daily mosaic pieces, its nature is that of a tense, quickly drying skin on the wall, very different from oils’ adaptability to the layering of paint surfaces on canvas.

The prestige of *modelli* during the eighteenth century is closely related to the larger view that the artist’s spontaneous touch (in drawings as well as oil sketches) revealed his unmediated conception. They were seen as able to affect the emotions of spectators more directly, since they were responding to an idea, a mood, rather than a formal production. This stress on the first stage of creation naturally resulted in the collection of *modelli*; Count Francesco Algarotti not only collected such works from Tiepolo’s hand, he also commissioned a Tiepolo *ricordi* after Veronese’s *Rape of Europa* (a picture that Algarotti had sold). He even asked him to retouch a copy after Veronese’s *Feast in the House of Simon* so that it would appear to be Veronese’s own *modello*.

Tiepolo’s close collaboration with his patrons is evident in the history behind two commissions by Algarotti: *Maecenas Presenting the Arts to Augustus* (c. 1743-44, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg) and *The Empire of Flora* (c. 1743-44, The Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco). Algarotti commissioned these as presents for Heinrich Brühl, the minister to Augustus III, King of Poland and elector of Saxony, hoping that Brühl would promote his own nomination to a post at Augustus III’s court, that of the Surintendent des Bästiments et Cabinets du Roi. Thus, the subjects flattered Augustus and Brühl, Northern patrons of the arts, who were bringing civilization to the banks of the Elbe. Architectural proof of this civilization was included in a view of Brühl’s own palace and hanging gardens, visible in the background of the *Maecenas*, for which Algarotti supplied drawings to Tiepolo. The urban view of *Maecenas* was paired with the flourishing gardens of *Flora*; this time Tiepolo includes a portrait of the new fountains by Matielli in Brühl’s summer palace. The former work is dignified, but by no means pedantic. Painting, kneeling in the foreground, suddenly solicits our attention not only by her costume, a brocade in intense blues and golds, but by her foreshortened head, turned up and away from us so that we can barely decipher her features. Flora, by contrast, regards the viewer with ironic humor, her arm akimbo, as her chariot is pulled across the canvas.

Algarotti, Tiepolo’s friend and patron, described him as a “pittore de macchia e spirituoso,” a phrase whose manifold implications stress conceptual as well as technical facility, vivacity, and inventiveness. Tiepolo’s
EXHIBITION REVIEWS

insights, brilliant orchestrations of color and touch, are splendid to see, even if only for a moment. We will savor them for a long time to come.

University of Texas at Arlington

BETH S. WRIGHT


The exhibition “The Age of the Baroque in Portugal” is organized by the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the Portuguese Secretary of State and Culture through the Instituto Portugês de Museus. Perhaps it is inevitable that an exhibition that, on the surface, offers so much should prove to be disappointing. It holds out the promise of experiencing an entire country, Portugal, in a glorious age, the baroque. Such a promise is, by its nature, impossible to fulfill. The question remains whether that promise should have been made in the first place.

The exhibition consists of six galleries divided by themes, which the accompanying leaflet describes as “public/private” and “secular/religious.” In these rooms we find a dazzling but miscellaneous assortment of objects manufactured or used in, or simply created for, the celebration of eighteenth-century Portugal. Thus one progresses past a magnificent coach made in Italy (1713-16) for use in Rome by a Portuguese ambassador; an early eighteenth-century panoramic view of Lisbon in azuleos (characteristic blue and white tiles), which once graced a palace in Lisbon itself; a processional altar of wrought silver (1689) crafted in Portuguese India; and porcelain (c. 1755) “ordered from Chinese factories whose output was designed to appeal to European taste,” all in the first three galleries.

The public/private and religious/secular dichotomies are immediately seen as inadequate from the first room, where the coach stands. This coach was one of four made for the official entry in Rome of the ambassador Marques de Fontes (1676-1733), a prominent nobleman dispatched, we are told, by Dom João V, who was anxious for the Pope to raise the bishopric of Lisbon to the status of patriarchate and to grant “other concessions.” The catalogue makes clear that those other concessions included further powers for the monarch of Portugal over the Portuguese Church. Neither the Pope nor Dom João can be construed as simply either a “religious” or “secular” leader; and their ambitions spread equally broadly. The iconography of the coach’s decoration refers to the house of Bragança, the city of Lisbon crowned by Fame, and the Portuguese overseas empire. Clearly the modern divisions between religious and secular, private and public are at odds