

Titian Remade. Repetition and the Transformation of Early Modern Italian Art. By Maria Loh. 176 pp. incl. 26 col. + 43 b. & w. ills. (Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2007), £30/\$45 (HB). ISBN 978-0-89236-899-0.

Reviewed by BERNARD AIKEMA

ART HISTORY IS usually concerned with the reconstruction and interpretation of facts and events that lead to a better understanding of works of art and artists' careers in their original context. The *fortuna critica* of an artist serves to illustrate how time has changed our perceptions, underscoring the need of a corrective, revisionist approach to the subject at hand. In *Titian Remade*, Maria Loh turns all this around. Criticising what she calls a 'teleological' convention, Loh sees (art) history as an ongoing process, a constantly changing narrative in which repeating a model is a sign of 'differentiated becoming' (Gilles Deleuze), not necessarily of decay or lack of inspiration. Rather than insisting on a hierarchical (vertical) relationship between master-pupil or inventor-imitator, Loh evokes the model of a 'rhizome', a system of artistic transmission mapped out through horizontal lines of connection that have 'no beginning or end' (Deleuze again). Starting from this proposition, the author takes a fresh look at seventeenth-century post-Titianesque painting in Venice, in particular the work of Alessandro Varotari, known as Padovanino, who is the true hero of the book (in point of fact, this should have been made clear in the title). Looking at Titian through Padovanino's lens: such is Loh's approach, which leads to some valuable insights into painterly ideas and practice in a relatively understudied and often rather summarily dismissed period of Venetian visual culture. Also, and perhaps more importantly, it invites us to reconsider our own preconceived ideas vis à vis one of the great moments of late Renaissance painting; all this in a well-written and nicely produced book.

In her first chapter, 'The "Delicious Nude": Repetition and Identity', Titian-inspired nude female figures in landscapes are presented as examples of a 'repetitive' approach rather than as 'repetitions', terminology the author has borrowed from film theory. The difference is in intentionality, between inventive variations on a given theme on the one hand and mechanical, uninspired copies on the other. According to this view, Padovanino transformed Titian's multifarious female nudes – Danaë, Venus, etc. – into spirited variations of the first category, appealing to the (male) viewer's capacity both to recognise the artist's figurative source and to appreciate the more or less subtle pictorial comments and alterations visualised in these works. 'Similar' to a given prototype, yet 'unique': such paintings would carry to the extreme the well-known Renaissance paradigm as formulated many

years ago by the Dutch scholar Eddy de Jongh (not quoted by Loh): 'A successful *aemulatio* [. . .] is one in which the work of art in question disguises its borrowings while simultaneously making apparent the similarities with the work that the artist was attempting to better – a matter of subtlety'.¹ For the public, these pictures would have served as 'prestige fetishes' and as sources for social discourse along the lines of a novel seicento sense of the unexpected, the paradox, the '*meraviglia*', as propagated by the poet Giambattista Marino and his numerous Venetian admirers (among them the literary star Giovan Francesco Loredano and the well-known art critic Marco Boschini). So far so good. Things get somewhat problematic when Loh states that Padovanino's 'conversion' to neo-Venetianism, as exemplified by his copies/elaborations of Titian's three mythologies for Alfonso d'Este (to which he added a fourth), would have been possible only in Rome, far away from Venice: 'The imbrication of Venice in Rome and Rome in Venice enabled the young Alessandro Varotari to experience the constructedness of his own history' (p.64), a curiously idealistic concept which the author tries to elaborate in a rather speculative reading of the fourth mythology, a work of Padovanino's own invention, depicting the *Rape of Europa* (Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena). This analysis leads to further thoughts about Padovanino's supposed obsession with a 'bizarre geometrical construct consisting of triangles inscribed in circles' (p.103) and his strategic use of (self-)portraiture in formulating a new sort of rapport with the art of Titian. The latter question, summarised in the title of the book's fourth chapter, 'Ancients and Moderns: Repetition and History', is central to Loh's main thesis, which she words as follows: 'Padovanino [. . .] was the external force who returned "Venice" to itself, the modern who remade the past for the men of the present so that they might father better sons for the future' (p.163). This statement is only partially correct. Notwithstanding fashionable *antioggiadianismo*, a literary movement which championed the virtues of modernism against traditional classicism, there is ample evidence for a general sense of inferiority among seicento Venetian literary men and critics with respect to their Renaissance predecessors. Venetian seventeenth-century (visual) culture is rich, complex and contradictory. If Loh had included other 'revival' artists from the period, such as Padovanino's pupils Pietro della Vecchia, Girolamo Forabosco and Pietro Liberi, or even Bernardo Strozzi, in her research, instead of focusing exclusively on Padovanino, her conclusions might have been more nuanced. She might also have realised that seventeenth-century *litterati* and artists from Venice were often not so much trying to *remake* a glorious past as to *create* a glorious tradition.

¹ E. de Jongh: Review of Peter Sutton's *Pieter de Hooch: Complete Edition, Simiolus* 11 (1980), p.183.

Le Meraviglie di Venezia: Dipinti del '700 in collezioni private. Edited by Dario Succi and Annalia Delneri. 343 pp. incl. 125 col. ills. (Marsilio Editori, Venice, 2008), €40. ISBN 978-8-317-9474-4.

Reviewed by MICHAEL LEVEY

'SEMPER ALIQUID NOVI': the ancients' tag about Africa can be applied today by students of the Venetian settecento to the output of fresh scholarly work constantly emerging from the province of Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, associated with the two collaborators on this most handsomely produced and absorbing catalogue of an exhibition shown at the Palazzo della Torre, Gorizia, unfortunately not seen by this reviewer, held at the very edge of the territory. It is the latest fruit of that collaboration and it must have been something of a first for Gorizia – though it seems unlikely to be the last.

Some reputable and not so reputable eighteenth-century Venetian figures visited the city (then Habsburg territory), among them the librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte, who sought refuge there after being tried in his absence for '*rapto di donna honesta*'. He found a cultural centre, with fine private libraries and a theatre, and also an especially warm reception from the attractive, obliging landlady of the first inn he entered; it was speedily a case of *così fan tutte*. More soberly, the present publication reminds us that among later '*eminenti personaggi goriziani*' have been a painter of the Venetian scene, Italo Brass, and a notable scholar of the Venetian settecento, Antonio Morassi.

Deserving of recognition as a distinct marvel of this exhibition is the fact that virtually all the great names of the period were represented. While it is true and unsurprising that it lacked any example of Giambattista Tiepolo or by Piazzetta, it had two paintings by Domenico Tiepolo and one by Maggioletto, as well as a pair of Piazzettesque yet paler-toned genre subjects by Giuseppe Angeli (cat. nos. 59 and 60). The Ricci, uncle and nephew, Amigoni, Pellegrini, the two Guardi brothers, in addition to Carlevarij, Canaletto, Bellotto and Michele Marieschi were present. Landscape painting was particularly strongly shown, with fine works not only by Zuccarelli and Zais but by Gaspare Diziani, and for portraiture there were pastels by Rosalba Carriera and Pietro Rotari. One could hardly expect religious painting to figure prominently in modern private collections, least of all on the scale of altarpieces, but one painting by Amigoni was of the *Holy Family* (no.18) and there was a pair of small, charming, undemanding religious-cum-landscape subjects by Zais (nos.20 and 21). Other, arguably more minor artists, were also included, with an impressive head of an old man by Nogari (no.49) and an attractive pair of Venetian views by Johann Richter (nos.78 and 79) which have the additional interest of unusual topographical angles. But the really remarkable twin aspects of the