

Ascanio Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*. Trans. by Alice Sedgwick Wohl, ed. by Hellmut Wohl. Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1976. 156 pp., 62 illus., \$15.00

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[See table of contents](#)

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inventive. Here Moffett is noteworthy for how he consistently ties his formal observations to matters not only of syntax but also of the personal sensibility of the artist. That is, he only occasionally falls prey to the chief occupational hazard of immanent analysis, 'mere' description.

Moffett's fifth chapter covers Noland's work of the 1970s, the 'plaids' and the shaped canvases. As good as the plaids can sometimes be, Moffett quite rightly finds them often looking boxed in and too ordered. The shaped canvases are another matter. Unlike Frank Stella, who has been 'insensitive to the necessity of creating a vital tension between the whole shape of the painting and the pictorial illusion, between the inside and the outside,' Noland works for an achieved rather than a predetermined balance. The implicit aesthetic theory here is surely superior to that in those accounts which would have Stella as fine an artist as Noland because of Stella's high degree of order. Thus Moffett shows his merit, offering sound aesthetic judgments, cogently argued, that go against the prevailing wisdom.

Moffett's last and shortest chapter takes up the issue of content in Noland's art. As always, he is an acute observer of tensions within the work, 'between splendor of color and its taut control, between clarity and immediacy of presentation and pictorial indeterminacy,' and so on. Further than this he does not go, apparently for two reasons. One would seem to be his stand that Noland's later work is 'more . . . self-referential, i.e. abstract, than any pictures before,' and another is Suzanne Langer's observation that abstract painting 'is not language because it has no vocabulary.' This is sound enough, but Moffett nonetheless inevitably draws attention to the limits of purely immanent analysis: it always operates at a full remove from the felt content of art. Furthermore, when Moffett argues that Noland 'has gained conscious control of all the co-ordinates of painting,' he seems not only to be denying those

limits but also to be contradicting much of his previous argument.

In sum, this is a fine book on an artist that Moffett and many others regard as 'one of the most inventive colorists in all of modern art.'

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ASCANIO CONDIVI *The Life of Michelangelo*. Trans. by Alice Sedgwick Wohl, ed. by Hellmut Wohl. Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1976. 156 pp., 62 illus., \$15.00.

Since primary sources for the lives of many Renaissance artists are limited, we are fortunate in possessing significant documentation, both biographical and autobiographical, for Michelangelo (Fig. 1). The artist's letters and poems, the two editions of Vasari's *Vite*, and the text reviewed here, Ascanio Condivi's *Life of Michelangelo*, are all major sources for the master's life.

Ascanio Condivi, a student of Michelangelo, wrote his biography in 1553, eleven years before Michelangelo's death at nearly eighty-nine in 1564. In a prefatory statement to the reader, Condivi points out several important fea-



FIGURE 1. Daniele da Volterra, *Michelangelo*. Condivi, frontispiece.

tures of his *Life (Vita)*. After expressing his desire to record and commemorate the life of this 'unique painter and sculptor,' he notes the need to correct information found in earlier accounts of his subject's life and stresses his personal connection with Michelangelo. Indeed, it is commonly accepted among Michelangelo scholars that the aging artist dictated the viewpoint and much of the contents of Condivi's work. This quasi-autobiographical dimension of the *Vita* is strongly argued by Hellmut Wohl in his introduction to a new English translation of the text: 'In spite of Condivi's insignificance in his own right, or perhaps because of it — because he was able to a remarkable degree to be the voice of his master — his biography of Michelangelo is, next to the artist's letters and poems, our strongest source for Michelangelo's life.' Wohl adds later: 'In effect, and by the testimony of Condivi in further passages throughout his text, the work that he composed is Michelangelo's autobiography — the first by a major Italian artist since Lorenzo Ghiberti's second *Commentario* a century earlier.'

While there are good modern editions of Condivi's *Vita* in Italian, it has long been difficult to obtain in English translation. This new version, the first in over seventy years, is a welcome addition to Michelangelo bibliography. Alice Sedgwick Wohl's translation is readable and accurate, and considerable effort has been made to ensure both clarity and fidelity to Condivi's tone. Detailed notes and copious illustrations complement the text, and a good survey of relevant literature is included in a bibliographical note. Other material useful in reading the text is found in a glossary of Italian terms and in two appendices on the genealogy of the Medici family and the history of the tomb of Pope Julius II.

In his introduction to Condivi's text, Hellmut Wohl discusses the earlier editions of the work and aptly analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the biography. Con-

divi was often unreliable in his facts, but more seriously, he was limited by his adulation of Michelangelo and by a lack of an analytical bent (in the preface to the reader Condivi characterizes himself as 'a diligent and faithful collector'). Wohl rightly points out that Condivi was even more hampered by what material Michelangelo chose to give to him. Yet it is just this controlling factor on Michelangelo's part that gives the text its value as a source for his life. Confession and self-justification were powerful factors in Michelangelo's use of Condivi's *Vita* to ensure a certain record of his life. Both the legendary and human aspects of the artist emerge in Condivi's narrative, including the famous tale of Michelangelo imbibing his propensity for sculpture from his wet nurse, the wife of a stonemason; and the frustration experienced by the artist over the 'tragedy' of the tomb of Julius II, which went through numerous changes and contracts as Michelangelo was torn between his powerful patrons.

In discussing Condivi's text, Wohl comments perceptively on its relationship to Vasari's first version of the life of Michelangelo written in 1550, which was the account in need of correction mentioned obliquely by Condivi in his preface. While Vasari's superior skills as an artist and art historian are reflected in his biography of Michelangelo, Condivi's text, although less objective and analytical, reflects a personal statement on and by the 'prince of the art of *disegno*' who dominated the sixteenth-century art world.

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MALCOLM CAMPBELL *Pietro da Cortona at the Pitti Palace*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977. 306 + xviii pp., 201 illus., \$45.00.

The critical situation has changed considerably since 1958, when

Rudolf Wittkower remarked that Pietro da Cortona, in contrast to Bernini and Borromini, had still to be given back his eminent position among the outstanding artists of the seventeenth century. Briganti's monograph of 1962, as well as Noehles's studies on Cortona's architecture and Vitzthum's publications on various aspects of the drawings and subject matter, among others, have done much to restore the artist to his rightful position. Nevertheless, in the English-speaking world, at least, the genius of Pietro da Cortona remains relatively obscure. No doubt this is largely due to the fact that Cortona's finest works are still *in situ* and, as with most great decorations, must be witnessed to be appreciated fully. Yet even the Pitti Palace, which possesses Cortona's most extensive decorations, offers such a treasury of great paintings on the walls that the frescoes and stuccoes on the ceiling are all too easily neglected. In recent years, however, the authorities have done everything to overcome this: suitable lighting of the frescoes has now been installed, and the progress of the visitor through the apartments has been made to correspond to seventeenth-century practice.

Malcolm Campbell's book, devoted to these very rooms, has experienced a long gestation. Growing out of a thesis presented at Princeton in the early 1960s, the book also incorporates the material of Campbell's catalogue of 1965 to an exhibition of Cortona's drawings from the Uffizi. As an art historical study, *Pietro da Cortona at the Pitti Palace* forms a natural sequel to John Rupert Martin's *The Farnese Gallery* (Princeton, 1965), and is indeed organized along roughly similar lines. (The major difference is that Campbell's book includes a lengthy catalogue of documents.) The subject, of course, lends itself to similar treatment: in each, a crucial seventeenth-century secular decoration is under consideration – one of the early Roman seicento, the other of the High Baroque. And just as Annibale Carracci's

Camerino in the Palazzo Farnese precedes his Galleria, so Pietro's Sala della Stufa in the Palazzo Pitti precedes the Planetary Rooms. In both books the patron and his family, and the great palace in which they reside, are rightly accorded major roles; and in both special attention is given to the significance of the individual decorations for the development of seventeenth-century style as a whole. Tellingly, Martin ends his central discussion with the heading 'The Farnese Gallery and the Baroque,' Campbell with 'The Pitti Palace Decorations and the Baroque.'

Comparison of the two books is thus almost inevitable but is not always relevant: suffice it to say that in this company Campbell's book often seems unnecessarily cumbersome. Perhaps if the author had first offered some of his more intricate arguments – such as that concerning the subject of the Sala della Stufa – in article form, his book would have been relieved of some of its more unwieldy sections. But another remedy would be needed for its well-meaning pedantry. Is the reader of this sort of book likely to require a footnote (p. 7) locating reproductions of the Farnese Gallery ceiling?

Although a native of Tuscany, Pietro da Cortona had made his reputation entirely in Rome. Even his presence in Florence in 1637 – when he first received a commission to work in the Palazzo Pitti – was merely by chance. Then engaged by the Pope's family, the Barberini, to decorate the enormous Salone ceiling of their Roman palace, Cortona had expressed a desire to experience Venetian painting at first hand, and towards that end had travelled northward in the entourage of Cardinal Giulio Sacchetti. The latter had stopped in Florence to witness the festivities marking the consummation of the marriage of Grand Duke Ferdinand II and Princess Vittoria della Rovere – an event that will assume further significance in its connection with the subject of the Pitti Palace frescoes – and at that