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Bolognese Drawings at the National Gallery

Bolognese Drawings in North American Collections, 1500-1800. An exhibition held at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 10 September – 8 November 1981.

Catalogue: Mary Cazort/Catherine Johnston, *Bolognese Drawings in North American Collections, 1500-1800*, Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada, 1982. 304 pp., 141 illus., $29.95 (paper).

It is entirely fitting that the National Gallery of Canada should organize an exhibition of Bolognese drawings: not one but two respected specialists in the field are part of the permanent staff of the Gallery. Moreover, the specializations of the two curators are complementary, as Catherine Johnston has previously focused on the drawings of Guido Reni and the artists around the Carracci, and Mimi Cazort on the Gandolfi and their contemporaries in the eighteenth century. In 1973, Catherine Johnston organized the important exhibition of Bolognese drawings at the Uffizi and she has also contributed general surveys of the subject to the series on drawings published by Fabbri Fratelli and Alinari. Currently she is cataloguing the Bolognese drawings in the British Museum and at Stockholm. Mimi Cazort, for her part, made numerous contributions to the catalogue of the major exhibition, *L'Arte del Settecento Emiliano*, held in Bologna in 1979. With such experience and expertise – doubly at hand – it is not surprising that the catalogue of the Ottawa exhibition constitutes one of the most substantial contributions to the study of drawings ever made in Canada. Just as important, the exhibition itself provided singular delight for the eye.

The drawings were handsomely displayed in a sequence of smaller rooms on the first floor of the National Gallery. Generally installed in chronological order, the works were mounted on panels attractively covered in greyish-beige fabric. The panels were placed at eye level and their horizontal thrust ensured a directional flow to the exhibition. At the end, an audio-visual show was included which provided an ampler art historical context, as well as a pungent introduction to the visual attractions of Bologna today.

Bolognese Drawings in North American Collections, 1500-1800 easily stands beside such analogous undertakings as Pierre Rosenberg's exhibition of French master drawings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in North America (1972-73) and Terisio Pignatti's selection of Venetian drawings from American collections (1974-75). Beginning with Francia, who enjoyed numerous ties with the ruling Bentivoglio family and whom Vasari credits with being one of the initiators of the *terza età*, the Ottawa exhibition extended through three, almost unbroken, centuries. It terminated in the early nineteenth century, with a sequence of *petits maîtres* practising in a neo-classical manner, and Bologna herself under the yoke of Napoleon. For most of the period, from the fall of the Bentivoglio in 1506 until Napoleon's entrance into Bologna in 1796, the city was part of the papal states, with the pope's authority exercised by a resident legate and vice-legate. The period was notably lacking in popular uprisings, and in general Bologna prospered. The city was thought to occupy a central position politically, with a *governo misto ... libero e dipendente*, just as in fact she was located in a central position geographically, at the cross-roads of Northern Italy. Most of the major Bolognese artists exploited these situations, and ties with Rome and the powerful papal families were especially important. Yet the local school still managed to maintain a remarkably homogeneous and consistent character. More continuous than the drawing tradition of Venice, but less intellectually rigorous than that of Florence, Bolognese draughtsmanship like that of all Italian schools was firmly focused on the human figure. Bolognese figure drawings were likely to combine elements of the pictorial illusionism of Northern Italy and the plastic analysis of Florence and Rome. Such drawings were usually carried out in black or red chalk, frequently heightened with white chalk. Very often they were executed on blue paper. In contrast, compositional drawings were normally done in pen and ink, frequently with much wash, on white paper. But Bolognese drawings could also feature the more unusual subjects of pure landscape or genre, as well as *quadratura* and *scenografia*. These categories were also

represented in the Ottawa show, though understandably in much smaller numbers than the figural drawings.

For the exhibition, the National Gallery of Canada was fortunate in securing loans of the utmost importance, and none more so than Francia's beautiful drawing on vellum with brown and green washes which opened the show. From the Pierpont Morgan Library, this drawing of Judith and Holofernes contributed much to the arresting effect of the first section of the exhibition. Technical virtuosity and stylistic diversity characterized the section, which boasted major sheets by Pupini, Nicolò dell' Abate, Tibaldi and Cesi. Colour also played a prominent role, as medium and ground varied considerably. Further variety was lent the installation by the inclusion of several double-sided sheets, fortunately displayed so that both sides could be examined. Naturally the heart of the exhibition was the drawings by the Carracci, and most aspects of their draughtsmanship were superbly represented. This could not have been the case had not it been for the dispersal of the Ellesmere collection at auction in London a decade ago. At the sale the Metropolitan Museum succeeded in capturing many of the choicest items and the museum was extremely generous in its loans to Ottawa, both at this point and throughout the exhibition. Though only one of the drawings is associated with the most significant of all Bolognese masterworks, the Carracci's frescoes in the Palazzo Farnese, impressive figure studies by their followers, such as Domenichino for S. Luigi dei Francesi and S. Carlo ai Catinari, and Guercino for the Casino Ludovisi, amply attest to the grandeur of the art the Bolognese continued to create in Rome. North American collections cannot begin to compete with the collections of figure studies found in Europe, particularly with that at Windsor; nevertheless the Ottawa exhibition did prove that there were at least representative examples on this continent by most of the major seventeenth-century Bolognese artists. Even rarer in any printroom are drawings by the greatest Bolognese sculptor, Alessandro Algardi, yet two fine examples were borrowed from major public collections and appear in the catalogue, to which the exhibition was supplemented by an outstanding black chalk example, newly acquired by a private collector in Montreal (Fig. 1). As the seventeenth century matured, Bolognese draughtmanship lost some of its concentrated intensity, and accordingly the Ottawa exhibition began at this point to produce a sparser visual effect. Variety, however, remained the order of the day, and in this hitherto little studied area novelties and new proposals abounded. The charm and delicacy of many of the sheets from around 1700 were eventually supplanted by the splendid vitality and assurance of the Gandolfi's drawings, borrowed from a wide range of public and private collections. In fact the organizers of the exhibition have conducted their quest for the widely dispersed drawings very thoroughly. And while a number of Bolognese artists are not included in the exhibition (e.g. Francesco Gessi, Lorenzo Pasinelli or Giuseppe Gambarini), important drawings by such artists may not be present in North America. Only in a few instances, such as the important sheet by Nosadella in the Metropolitan Museum (repr. Jacob Bean, *15th and 16th Century Italian Drawings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York, 1982, p. 48), were works by unrepresented artists not available for inclusion.

Of the 124 drawings in the exhibition, twelve belong to the permanent collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Such a concentration of local material was not merely a matter of convenience or *campanilismo;* instead it proclaimed the singular strengths of the national collection in this area. Not all the appropriate material in Ottawa was even exploited; thus Gaetano Gandolfi's large and impressive *Marriage at Cana,* which figured prominently at the Settecento Emiliano show of 1979, was not officially included in the Ottawa exhibition, though it did appear *fuori catalogo* on the walls. Sheets by Bolognese artists were in fact among the first old master drawings purchased by the National Gallery, and as early as 1911 the Advisory Arts Council recommended that the Gallery acquire an enchanting sheet of studies by Annibale Carracci. That the same drawing handsomely appears on the cover of the catalogue of the present exhibition testifies to the perspicacity of that recommendation. Indeed the National Gallery has repeatedly manifested, perhaps not entirely intentionally, a felicitous affinity for the works of Annibale Carracci, the greatest of all Bolognese artists. Thus, a double-sided black chalk drawing acquired on the advice of A.E. Popham as by Cavedone was subsequently demonstrated in a seminar of Walter Vitzthum's at the University of Toronto to be Annibale Carracci's figure studies for the Palazzo Fava, Bologna (Fig. 2). With the acquisition of the *Vision of St. Francis* in 1977 the Gallery became one of the few institutions in North America to possess a painting by the artist. Since then the Gallery has happily secured the only preparatory drawing – a rapid pen and ink sketch – still in private hands for the painting. Both painting and preliminary drawing were appropriately hung together in the exhibition. Otherwise, the exhibition included major sheets by Tiarini and Guercino, recommended for purchase by Paul Oppé in the 1950s, and drawings by Ludovico Carracci and Faccini (from the Ellesmere collection) and Cantarini and Milani acquired more recently by Mimi Cazort. The existence of such immediate resources has undoubtedly provided special impetus to the organizers of the exhibition. But the Ottawa curators are not stopping there: since the exhibition, they have already spotted at auction and acquired a hitherto unknown study by Guido Reni.

The catalogue of the exhibition will long remain an important source of information about Bolognese draughtsmanship. It opens with an extensive introduction to Bolognese history and artistic achievement which will prove invaluable to any newcomer in the

FIGURE 1. Alessandro Algardi, *The Holy Family and Two Angels*, black chalk, 260 × 200 mm. Montreal, private collection (Photo: Owner).

FIGURE 2. Annibale Carracci, *Standing Male Figure* (cat. 25), black chalk on blue green paper, 413 × 235 mm. Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada (Photo: Museum).

field. Some subdividing of the long text might, however, have facilitated quicker retrieval of specific information. A bonus to the Introduction is the concluding paragraphs on the collecting of Bolognese drawings, both in Europe and America. It is understandable that nothing is said about such activities in Canada, since they are so few. Yet it may not be entirely impertinent to draw attention to one isolated, and unrecorded, example of Bolognese draughtsmanship in the Agnes Etherington Art Centre at Queen's University – especially as the sheet appears to represent a personification of Felsina, the Etruscan precursor of Bologna (Fig. 3). Acquired in 1976 as a gift from Dr. Alfred Bader, the drawing was generically catalogued as 'North Italian – 18th century,' but it can now be given with more precision to Ubaldo Gandolfi. In the catalogue the individual entries are detailed and pertinent, though on occasion the material is presented as if it were newer than it is. In particular, the information in dealer's catalogues is sometimes neglected. Thus the entries for cat. 21 and 91 (Ludovico Carracci and Aureliano Milani) both fail to mention the publication of reasonably similar information in Yvonne Tan Bunzl's catalogues for 1975 and 1976 respectively. The *recto* of cat. 63 (a double-sided sheet by G.F. Grimaldi) is reproduced in *Drawings in the Collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario* (1970), yet this catalogue is not cited either. These, however, are minor omissions in a catalogue so crammed with information. The biographies of artists are generally up to date and revealing; indeed, they alone would ensure the catalogue's value as an indispensable work of reference. (Especially illuminating for both the biographies and the discussion of individual works of art are the many references to the still unpublished Oretti manuscripts in the Biblioteca comunale, Bologna.) All 124 drawings – *versos* as well as *rectos* – are reproduced in full-page illustrations. While the quality of the illustrations is generally adequate, many readers will regret that the quality does not attain the level found in the publications of several east coast American institutions, for the visual evidence of this catalogue will be as much consulted as the verbal. Many may also regret the price of $29.95, or (according to the back cover) $35.00 in the United States and £24.50 in the United Kingdom.

Due to no fault of the authors, the catalogue itself did not appear in print until after the exhibition had closed, so a four-page pamphlet was distributed *gratis*. Lastly, it is a great pity that such a significant and arresting exhibition could not have travelled, but the conditions imposed by many of the most important lenders prohibited such a tour.

The following are observations about individual drawings: Cat. 3: Aspertini (Fogg Art Museum). While the conspicuous, left-handed hatching of the *verso* of this double-side sheet would seem to be at variance with the evidence of the *recto*, the copies by Aspertini after the antique in the sketchbooks in the British Museum (cf. P.P. Bober, *Drawings after the Antique by Amico Aspertini*, London, 1957) also reveal considerable left-handed hatching; and so this feature may add support for Oberhuber's attribution of the sheet.

FIGURE 3. Ubaldo Gandolfi, *Felsina (?)*, pen and brown ink and wash over traces of black chalk, cut out and laid down, 280 × 208 mm. Gift of Dr. Alfred Bader, 1976. Kingston, Agnes Etherington Art Centre (Photo: Museum).

Cat. 4 and 5: Innocenza da Imola (Fogg Art Museum). Of these two closely related figure studies for God the Father in the *Annunciation* in S. Maria dei Servi, Bologna, cat. 5 would seem to be a copy after cat. 4, which discloses *pentimenti*, such as those along the top of the outstretched arms, not repeated in the drier treatments thereafter. The study of hands in cat. 5 is no doubt copied after another, now lost, autograph drawing by Innocenza da Imola.

Cat. 23: Agostino Carracci (Rhode Island School of Design). Not only is the handling of the chalk in this figure of an apostle for a *Last Supper* indebted to Tintoretto, as noted in the catalogue, but the motif of the figure bending down to pass bread to a beggar must also derived from Tintoretto (e.g. his *Last Supper* in S. Polo, Venice), even if the iconographic interpretation of the apostle may be different.

Cat. 31: Annibale Carracci (Metropolitan Museum of Art). This black chalk study and the related sheet in the John Winter collection are connected with the triton sounding a conch shell in the fresco *Thetis Borne to the Wedding Chamber of Peleus*, which was executed by Agostino Carracci in the Galleria Farnese. Although the attribution of these two drawings to Annibale Carracci has not evidently been questioned, the possibility that they are instead by Agostino, and represent *his* Roman manner, should surely be left open, as it was proposed by a James Bourdeau in a seminar at Queen's University. Too little is known about Agostino's mature chalk manner, and it might be reasonably supposed that his style, like Annibale's, became more monumental and sculptural once he settled in Rome. Perhaps some of Agostino's more decorative approach to contour, however, can be detected in such areas as the musculature of the triton's left arm. As Martin (*The Farnese Gallery*, 1965, p. 214) pointed out, the pose of the triton ultimately derives from the figure at the left of Raphael's *Galatea*.

Cat. 32: Annibale Carracci (Fogg Art Museum). This pen and ink drawing of Christ in Glory with the Virgin and St. John the Baptist, St. Michael and other figures is an important new discovery in Annibale's Roman manner, but is as yet unconnected with any known commission.

Cat. 35: Pietro Faccini (National Gallery of Canada). The entry constitutes an important discussion of Faccini's compositions of the raising of Lazarus and changes the attribution of this sheet (from the Ellesmere collection) from Ludovico Carracci to Faccini.

Cat 44: Lucio Massari (Cooper-Hewitt Museum). Whoever was the author of this design for a ceiling painting, he must have been looking at Michelangelo (the Jonah on the Sistine Chapel ceiling) and Correggio, as well as at Tibaldi, as mentioned in the catalogue.

Cat. 74: Carlo Cignani (Art Institute of Chicago). With regard to the attribution, it is worth including that the sheet bears an old inscription to Carlo Cignani.

Cat. 75: Carlo Cignani (Detroit Institute of Arts). This tentative attribution is not altogether convincing, and a French source should also be investigated.

Cat. 111: Gaetano Gandolfi (Art Gallery of Ontario). Renato Roli (*Paragone*, n° 389 [1982], p. 73) has identified a related painting of the *Crucifixion of St. Peter* (repr. Roli, *Pittura bolognese 1650-1800*, Bologna, 1977, pl. 280c).

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