

# THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE



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**Go Figure! New Perspectives on Guston.**

Edited by Peter Benson Miller. 160 pp. incl. 53 col. + b. & w. ills. (American Academy in Rome, New York Review of Books, New York, 2014), \$99.99. ISBN 978-1-59017-878-2.

Reviewed by SAM LADKIN

THIS IS A handsome book, the reproductions clean and bright, the tone largely welcoming. It is hard to imagine a better gift than a residence at the American Academy in Rome, and much of this book is dedicated to Philip Guston's three stints in the Eternal City, the first in 1948–49, the second in 1960 (when he was not part of the Academy but resident while showing at the Venice Biennale) and the third in 1970–71. It incorporates papers given at a conference in Italy which coincided with the exhibition *Philip Guston, Roma* (that catalogue is available too, as is the definitive collection of Guston's writings, edited by Clark Coolidge). Robert Storr suggests that Guston teaches us the 'necessity of constantly messing up the tidy models of "artistic" progress'. Storr also infers that the artist's three visits to Rome help us locate Guston's messy transitions. All the essays have lively premises, although only a couple develop their contentions with sufficient evidence or see through their arguments to completion. That said, there is much to follow up here for those who are willing.

Guston is well served by critical work, and some of those outriders are included here, with plenty of insights from Storr in his preface and as part of a panel. This reviewer would like to know more about the influence of John Cage and Zen that he posits, and the connection to the golem is intriguing. Dore Ashton has written persuasively on Guston before, although here the contribution feels a little more like a second preface, while Bill Berkson nicely captures Guston's 'touch' and 'all that meat and air'.

Kosme de Batañano considers the influence of *manieri*, which works to destabilise our sense of Guston's known affection for Piero della Francesca and the quattrocento. It twins Guston's late work with Pontormo's Mannerism, both being late styles. Barbara Drudi returns us to post-War Rome and describes its various artists and their scenes. She mentions friendships and alignments with a number of artists, the majority of whom at least troubled the waters between abstraction and figuration: Toti Scialoja, Piero Dorazio, Alberto Burri (whose work with tar and mould offers a parallel next to Guston's 'meat and air'), Mirko Basaldella and Afro Basaldella. Ara H. Merjian accounts for the legacy of de Chirico in 'Guston's Italian Badness.' Achille Bonito Oliva's 'The Figurable', a rather breathless essay, considers the representation of used objects as part of the exchange between 'the everyday and existentialism'. David Lewis sensitively considers Guston and his 'break-up' with Mor-

ton Feldman, while Robert Slifkin's account of a modernist trajectory hinges upon Guston's exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery in 1960 (the death-knell for Feldman's and Guston's friendship). Christoph Shreier gestures towards the influence Guston has had on three generations of German art, most convincingly on Georg Baselitz. Peter Benson Miller (who curated the *Roma* show) provides helpful evidence of the role of allegory in Guston's thought, a connection taken up by David Kaufmann in his treatment of 'Guston's Melancholy'.

The standout essay is perhaps by David Anfam, although it underplays Guston's mordant humour. 'Guston's Trauma: Ideal/Abject' offers a dialectical reading of Guston: female/male; ideal/abject; past/present etc. Although not by any stretch the first to consider such history, it is one of the most convincing essays to diagnose Guston's survivor's guilt on a personal level (as a child Guston discovered the body of his father, who had committed suicide by hanging, and witnessed his elder brother's death from gangrene), as well as on the world-historical stage (the Ku Klux Klan, the Holocaust). Rather than existential alienation, the blazon of Guston's late work becomes more directly painful, the 'mangled limbs and feet, the stitches, the wounded and swollen heads, the cyclopean eyes staring at voids'. The ideal, only alluded to – go figure! – becomes Guston's late break from the real taken in the city of Rome.

**Publications Received**

*A Guide to Baroque Rome: the Palaces.* By Anthony Langdon. 292 pp. incl. 142 b. & w. ills. (Pallas Athene, London, 2015), £49.95. ISBN 978-1-84368-115-1 (HB); 978-1-84368-114-1 (PB).

Anthony Blunt's classic *Guide to Baroque Rome* of 1982 has for some time looked outdated in the light of the significant amount of subsequent research on the Baroque city. Blunt's book was intended to be both portable for the visitor and a guide for scholars and students of the period. He privileged architecture above painting and sculpture, and especially concentrated on ecclesiastical architecture. Anthony Langdon's admirable volume revises the part of Blunt's book concerned with palaces. Using an identical format, it updates and considerably expands upon this section, which received a relatively cursory treatment (65 pages to Langdon's 222). The author modestly claims that his volume is not an attempt to supplement Blunt, but in fact it goes much further.

Langdon has rewritten and amplified Blunt's often terse entries, and has included a number of buildings that Blunt omitted, for example the Casa degli Agostiniani Scalzi 'for sheer architectural merit' (p.17), and buildings which, perhaps because he mostly concentrated on family palaces, Blunt included under 'Miscellaneous', such as the Palazzo del Monte della Pietà. In particular Langdon introduces structures which were not grand dwellings for papal families and other members of the elite, but rather some of the buildings of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century which were built as apartment blocks for the rising professional 'middle class', but whose architectural features have much in common with the so-called *barocchetto*, most notably the elegant buildings by Raguzzini in Piazza S. Ignazio, which received summary treatment from Blunt. Langdon's elegantly

written entries incorporate a considerable amount of recent scholarship on individual palaces, as well as his own, acute and often trenchant, observations on individual structures. Moreover, far more attention is given to the interior decoration of these palaces, and to the collections they contained.

The book is usefully illustrated, mostly with contemporary prints, such as those of the De Rossi family, Giovanni Battista Falda and Giuseppe Vasi, as well as the remarkable engravings of the French nineteenth-century architect Paul-Marie Letarouilly, which enhance our understanding of the appearance of the Baroque city, when so many façades have been subsequently modified (pp.27–32). There are also many photographs, mostly the author's own, of architectural details.

In the spirit of Blunt's original guide, useful practical notes are given, particularly on the accessibility of buildings. (Here one senses the author's persistence in the face of often frustrating problems of trying to gain entry to some of Rome's significant historical buildings, which will be familiar to Roman scholars.) Interesting itineraries are also suggested. There is also a helpful glossary of architectural terms. With its pocket-size format, this will be an invaluable up-to-date companion for any visitor interested in Baroque Rome, but it also has much to offer the scholar.

CLARE ROBERTSON

*I colori del bianco e nero: Fotografie storiche nella Fototeca Zeri: 1870–1920.* Edited by Andrea Bacchi, Francesca Mambelli, Marcello Rossini and Elisabetta Sambo. 296 pp. incl. 400 col. + b. & w. ills. (Fondazione Federico Zeri, Bologna, 2014), €40. ISBN 978-88-940471-0-3.

This beautifully produced volume focuses on the historical photographs of works of art, ranging in date from 1870 to 1920, that belonged to Federico Zeri, and that today form part of the easily accessible (both physically and online) 'Fototeca' at the Fondazione Federico Zeri, Università di Bologna. These early photographs, the most precious part of Zeri's collection, were, however, mixed in with more recent prints, all filed together under the names of artists. The aim of this publication is to extract them from the rest and examine them with fresh eyes.

In his introductory essay, Andrea Bacchi emphasises the importance of historical photographs for modern research. He cites the example of Duccio's *Stoclet Madonna*, today at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, which a photograph in Zeri's archive dating from 1870–1900 shows in a different state of conservation from that in a better-known image dating from 1904 (when the painting was exhibited at the *Mostra d'arte antica senese*), thereby proving that it was not a forgery, as claimed in the pages of the *New York Times* in 2006 shortly after its acquisition by the Museum.

Massimo Ferretti contributes a wide-ranging essay, in which he remarks that while photography was not the chief cause of the birth of art history as an academic discipline in the second half of the nineteenth century, it contributed to it decisively. He also focuses on the moments of fundamental change in the reproduction of works of art, comparing the shift from engravings to photographs to that from analogue to digital photography, which he rightly considers revolutionary.

Elisabetta Sambo gives a succinct history of the archive, which Zeri himself claimed to be 'the biggest private photographic archive in the world', consisting of c.290,000 images of paintings, sculptures, architecture and objects. Zeri started to collect photographs only in the late 1940s, but his archive included a large number of historical photographs, added when he acquired important archives that had belonged to photographers, restorers, dealers and art historians of previous generations, including, among others, Umberto Gnoli, Evelyn Sandberg Vavalà and Antonio Muñoz, a relative of Zeri's.

The section 'Percorsi' includes several case histories that prove that photography is not a 'neutral' medium