

## Flemish and Dutch painters in Southern Italy

Review of: Giovanna Capitelli, Tania De Nile & Arnold Witte (eds.), *Fiamminghi al Sud. Oltre Napoli* (Papers of the Royal Netherlands Institute in Rome, vol. 73), Rome, Edizioni Quasar, 2023, 328 p., ISBN: 9788854913431, € 65,00.

Bram de Klerck

Radboud Universiteit

[bram.deklerck@ru.nl](mailto:bram.deklerck@ru.nl)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3418-6854>

Much has been written about artistic relationships between Italy and the Netherlands during the Early Modern period. From at least the fifteenth century onwards, works by Netherlandish painters were avidly collected and commissioned in Italy, and artists themselves travelled south. Studies on this mobility have long focused mainly on North and Central Italy, but since the 1970s there has also been art-historical interest in the Flemish and Dutch presence in the Viceroyalty of Naples and the Kingdom of Sicily. We now know more about the careers and production of painters such as Aert Mijtns, called Rinaldo Fiammingo, who was born in Brussels, worked in Naples and L'Aquila, and eventually died in Rome in 1602; Dirck Hendricksz Centen, or Teodoro d'Errico, who hailed from Amsterdam and died there but made a career in Naples for about three decades from 1574 onwards; and the prolific Matthias Stom, documented in the 1630s and 1640s in Naples and Sicily.

These artists number among the protagonists of *Fiamminghi al Sud. Oltre Napoli*, a collection of papers delivered at a symposium organised by the Royal Dutch Institute in Rome (KNIR) in 2018, in collaboration with Calabria University and the RKD - Netherlands Institute for Art History in The Hague. The book, edited by Giovanna Capitelli (Roma Tre University), Tania De Nile (University of Rome 'Tor Vergata') and Arnold Witte (University of Amsterdam), contains an introduction and essays by nineteen contributors, most in Italian but with two in English. The editors' introduction acknowledges the upheaval in the specialised literature on Dutch and Flemish art and artists in Southern Italy and emphasizes that, although many studies on the subject have been published, *sguardi a volo d'uccello* in the field remain scarce. This rich and informative volume does not attempt to be that much desired general overview. Rather, it aims to be 'a bibliographic and methodological navigational instrument' in the field.

A rather disparate array of contributions covers a range of subjects and approaches. Apart from a discussion of some late-fifteenth-century panels in Naples, the focus is on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The contributors concentrate

on painters and paintings (and one tapestry), with the exception of Loredana Lorizzo's description of Dutch and Flemish engravers in Naples, of whom the most important are Martin van Buyten around 1620, and Albertus Clouwet half a century later.

Questions of historiography and context are addressed via discussions of the sources and documentation of Netherlandish artists' mobility in Southern Italy (Giovanna Saporì) and Dominicus Lampsonius's collection of poems in praise of Flemish painters (1572) and its reception in Southern Italian art literature (Barbara Mancuso and Valter Pinto). Two papers on art patronage, one concerned with the possible role of meridional cardinal-bishops as agents between Rome and their hometowns (Arnold Witte), the other with the Capuchin Order in late-sixteenth-century Sicily (Vincenzo Abbate), present valuable contextual information but discuss specific works of art (by Dirck Hendricksz and Hector Crucer, respectively) almost as an afterthought. A bit anomalous in the context of this volume is Marije Osnabrugge's reconstruction of possible innovations introduced in Naples by Louis Finson and Matthias Stom in paintings including the female nude.

Several authors follow the more object-based art-historical path by concentrating on reconstructions of certain artists' production in Southern Italy, creating useful overviews that often include rediscovered archival data, new attributions, and hitherto unpublished works by painters like the abovementioned Aert Mijtnens in Rome and Naples (Luca Pezzuto) as well as in Basilicata (Mauro Vincenzo Fontana); the workshop practices in Naples and Calabria of the Mechelen-born Cornelis de Smet, called Cornelio Ferraro (who died in Naples in 1592), his collaborator Wenzel Cobergher, his pupil Pietro Torres, and his son Cesare Smet (Stefano De Mieri and Pierluigi Leone de Castris); the activities of Dirck Hendricksz Centen in Calabria (Tania De Nile), Gaspar Hovic, a native of Oudenaarde who would die in Bari in 1627, and his Flemish colleagues in Apulia (Francesco Lofano).

Other chapters treat more specific themes. Panayotis Ioannou elucidates artistic and personal relationships between Flemish expatriates and the Greek-Italian painter Belisario Corenzio during the latter's stay in Naples around 1600. Gert Jan van der Sman presents an accurate revaluation of Matthias Stom's artistic development, from his probable beginnings in Antwerp (not Amersfoort as traditionally believed) to his career in Rome and Naples. Giuseppe Porzio draws attention to a newly discovered artistic personality from Stom's circle, the anonymous *Maestro delle scene bacchiche*. Letizia Gaeta takes up an older argument, clarifying that a Neapolitan but clearly Flemish-inspired panel of the *Archangel Michael with saints and commissioners* (Naples, Capodimonte) should in all probability be considered a reflection of first-hand knowledge of Hans Memling's famous *Last Judgement* altarpiece now in Gdańsk. This indicates artistic mobility in the less common south-north direction if indeed the painting should be related to Neapolitan artist Giovanni di Giusto, who went to Bruges to learn from Flemish painters. In-depth analyses discuss individual works: a huge canvas of the *Crucifixion* by Aert Mijtnens in the church of San Bernardino in L'Aquila (Michele Maccherini), and, appropriately defined *fuori contesto*, a tapestry once part of a mythological Meleager series (ca. 1675) made in Brussels by Jan Leyniers II, which came to Gerace in Calabria probably only in the 1730s or 1740s (Giovanna Capitelli).

This handsomely produced volume presents summarizing analyses of established knowledge and new material. As far as attributions and artistic interrelationships are concerned, there is sometimes an unfortunate tendency towards enumeration, especially where reference illustrations are lacking. Those included, however, offer reproductions of striking paintings by e.g., Mijtnens, De Smet, and Stom (some having been restored recently) but also works of lesser artistic quality. Frequently they appear to be in rather deplorable condition, attesting to a neglect that, due to studies like those collected in this book, is beginning to be rectified.