

Gregorio Comanini

THE FIGINO, OR ON THE PURPOSE OF PAINTING

Art Theory in the Late Renaissance

Translated and Edited by Ann Doyle-Anderson and Giancarlo Maiorino

Gregorio Comanini's dialogue *Il Figino overo del fine della Pittura* (1591) offers one of the most comprehensive overviews of aesthetic theory and practice in the late sixteenth century. The dialogue takes the form of a conversation among the author's friends about the *fine*, or ultimate purpose, of art. Comanini's interlocutors draw extensively from classical and contemporary theory – Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Mazzoni, Tasso, Paleotti – in addressing the vigorously debated aesthetic issues of their day: the nature of imitation and the role of the artist's imagination; verisimilitude in literature and painting; correspondences and differences among literature, painting, and music; the superiority of one art to another; and the question of artistic decorum, a delicate issue in the climate of the Counter-Reformation. Accompanying this theoretical discussion are comments on works by Michelangelo, Giulio Romano, Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Torquato Tasso. Two painters, Ambrogio Figino and Giuseppe Arcimboldo, are presented as emblematic of the two opposing aesthetic stances – art is to teach / art is to please – that structure the dialogue. Although the discussion ends with the apparent triumph of the moral, didactic aesthetic, an ambiguity remains. What emerges from Comanini's blending of ethical and aesthetic considerations is his absolute conviction that art plays a critical role in human existence, whether as entertainment, mirror of human activity, or teacher of moral truths.

Ann Doyle-Anderson and Giancarlo Maiorino provide the first complete English translation of Comanini's text, along with an introduction and extensive notes. Their work is a welcome addition to the field of Renaissance studies.

(Toronto Italian Studies)

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