

BENVENUTO CELLINI

Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer



EDITED BY

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INTRODUCTION



Margaret A. Gallucci and Paolo L. Rossi

B*envenuto Cellini*, the first anthology in English on the great Italian Renaissance artist and autobiographer Benvenuto Cellini (1500–71), offers new perspectives on the artist and his place in Renaissance art, literature, and culture, as well as his legacy in European publishing history and modern American pop culture. The essays in this volume approach the multifaceted career of Cellini from a multidisciplinary perspective, cutting across boundaries, as did the artist himself. We have brought together for the first time scholars from a wide range of disciplines who utilize a variety of critical approaches in interpreting Cellini’s life and works. Our richly illustrated volume, containing new photography of the artist’s spectacular *Saltcellar*, commissioned by French King Francis I and housed in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, offers new insights into the life, works, and legacy of this major figure of the Renaissance.

Our book consists of nine essays in five parts. To avoid undermining the interdisciplinary nature of the project by separating Cellini’s art from his writings, and thus images from texts, we have arranged the articles by medium and milieu. Part I, “Competition, Creativity, and Court Culture,” picks up the theme of Cellini the artist and traces his strategies of power and patronage in his relations with patrons and rival artists, particularly at the Medici court. It explores how his very different activities reflected not only his need to be flexible, in the light of changing requests from his patrons, but also the evolution of his own self-awareness as a unique creative talent. Jane Tylus analyzes

the production of a language of inimitability in the writings of both Michelangelo and Cellini, suggesting that Cellini was central in creating a new system of generating aesthetic value in late Renaissance Italy. Patricia Reilly shows how, after the death of Michelangelo in 1564, Cellini and two of his contemporary artists, Alessandro Allori and Vincenzo Danti, set out to elevate the status of their art by codifying in treatise form Michelangelo's principles of constructing the anatomically correct human form. They did so, she argues, to gain admission to the prestigious literary institution, the *Accademia Fiorentina*.

The next section focuses on goldsmithing and jewellery at the courts of the papacy in Rome and of King Francis I in Paris and sculpture at the Medici court in Florence. Part II, "Cellini as Artisan, Artist, and Author," therefore sheds light on Cellini's career, his training, the importance and manufacture of small precious objects, as well as large-scale projects, and on his writings. Michael Cole considers Cellini's sculptural career in Florence, presenting a sociology of the bronze caster that attempts to pin down for the first time the reasons for the artist's failure to become Florence's premier bronzist. The second essay in this section assesses the design and function of the *Saltcellar* (Belozerskaya) and analyzes his coins and medals (Attwood). Marina Belozerskaya analyzes the role of the *saliera* as bearer and framer – symbolically, gustatorially, and economically – of salt and pepper as well as an exposition of Francis I's domestic and international policies. Philip Attwood places Cellini's neglected coins and medals into a multivalent context of contemporary tastes and practices that argues for a renewed appreciation of Cellini's skill in producing strikingly original and beautiful designs. Part II examines the commissions in bronze and marble that he executed for Duke Cosimo I de' Medici and traces the import of these works, both for his career and for the development of his working practice. All of these topics are extensively treated by Cellini in both his *Vita* and his *Treatises on Goldsmithing and Sculpture*.

Part III, “Artistic Production, Gender, and Literary Practice,” contains two essays that use gender theory to link Cellini’s artistic production to his writings and to explore the complex iconography embedded in the works the artist executed for Cosimo I. Gwendolyn Trottein argues that Cellini’s “icons,” whether sculpted with words or wax, defy “graphy,” keeping at bay the unavoidably reductive nature of writing, while nonetheless appropriating classical and topical content. Victoria Gardner Coates suggests that Cellini’s art and writings reveal a consistent approach to portraiture based on the actual features of the subject that the artist then heroicizes through the process of *imitazione*, designed to associate the portraits with a series of canonical models.

Having established the world of Cellini’s prose, Part IV, “The History and Reception of Cellini’s *Trattati*,” concentrates on the tortured history of his literary production. The essay that comprises this part nails down, for the first time, the exact circumstances and personalities involved not only in the writing of the *Trattati* but also in the tangled history of their publication. Paolo Rossi analyzes the literary strategies and aspirations employed by Cellini when he realized that, by the mid-1560s, his career as an artist was over. For Rossi, the two versions of the *Trattati* were aimed at securing a position within the context of the Medici fascination with experimentation and investigation of the natural world. Rossi offers a fascinating account of the *editio princeps* of the *Trattati* and of the historical circumstances of the text’s publication, reception, and subsequent fortune prior to the twentieth century.

The concluding Part V, serving as Epilogue, “Metamorphosis Into the Artist as Modern Hero,” brings Cellini into the twentieth century by exploring the enduring popularity of the artist in the twentieth-century American imagination. Margaret Gallucci’s article complements the essay by Rossi by considering the critical fortune of Cellini, the man and myth, in modern and postmodern American popular culture just as Part IV discusses the critical fortune of one of

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the artist's primary texts. Her essay examines Cellini's lasting fascination, both as an artist and as a lionized symbol of that much applauded fiction, the "Renaissance Man."

We would like to advise the reader that the Select Bibliography lists only secondary and not primary sources. For primary sources, please refer to the notes to the individual essay.