

Rezensionen

GOTTFRIED BOEHM, *Bildnis und Individuum: Über den Ursprung der Porträtmalerei in der Italienischen Renaissance*. München, Prestel, 1985. pp. 316. 174 + XVI illus. 68,— DM.

The aim of Gottfried Boehm's book is an ambitious one. It is nothing less than to explore the relationship between the Renaissance portrait and Renaissance individualism. In a sense it is a Burckhardtian enterprise, though Jacob Burckhardt himself never filled the gap between his famous discussion of individualism in *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, which had little to say about art, and the late essay *Das Porträt*, which discusses little else. Boehm is an art historian who wrote his dissertation on Venetian portraits between 1470 and 1530. He is also an ex-pupil of Hans-Georg Gadamer, and retains a strong interest in philosophy, more especially in hermeneutics, on which he has written elsewhere. Besides Gadamer, Kant, Hegel, Dilthey, Cassirer, Heidegger, Adorno, Plessner and Blumenberg are cited at some point in this study. It is divided into sixteen thematic chapters or essays which deal with the concepts of the portrait and the individual, with rhetoric, with physiognomy, with genre, with self-portraits, with quasi-portraits (that is, with images which are either idealised or stereotyped in other ways), and with the contributions to the art of the portrait made by individual artists, mainly from the north of Italy, notably the Bellinis, Giorgione, Lotto, Moretto of Brescia, and Titian (for some reason Morone is omitted). The chapter on Raphael and Bronzino seems to have been added as a kind of afterthought, in the process of turning a dissertation on Venice into a more general book.

It will be clear from this brief description that Boehm is not so much interested in the 'origin' of the portrait in the sense of its beginnings, as in the reasons for the rise of this particular genre. It is not, he says, *Einflußgeschichte* or indeed *Fortschrittgeschichte* that he wishes to write. What he does want to write is not defined and it is indeed rather more elusive.

I consider Boehm's question about the origins of the portrait to be an important and indeed a fascinating one, but I must confess to finding difficulties with his answer, or more exactly with the justifications for his answer, and this for reasons which include but also go beyond an English empiricist historian's unfamiliarity — indeed, sense of unease — with the German philosophical tradition. Boehm's strengths are at the opposite ends of his subject, in art history and philosophy. His weaknesses are in the large central area, in the field of socio-cultural history.

On one side, the author has a good knowledge of the rich secondary literature concerning Italian Renaissance portraits (though his bibliography omits Enrico Castelnuovo's important essay of 1973 on *Il significato del ritratto pittorico nella società*). He has a keen eye for visual detail and has perceptive points to make, for example, about Lotto's use of a square canvas in the Odoni portrait and his use of space to frame the sitter. In the case of another Lotto, the portrait of the so-called 'young scholar' now in the Accademia in Venice, Boehm offers us a rich, intuitive, highly personal description and interpretation, reminiscent in some ways of *Bomarzo*, that

remarkable novel by Manuel Mujica Lainez which takes the same picture as its point of departure. In the case of Titian, he provides some brief but illuminating comments on what he calls the painter's 'irony', a valuable way of approaching the well-known and awkward problem of images like Paul IV and his *nipoti*, or Jacopo Strada, which seem to the modern viewer (perhaps anachronistically) to be caricatures.

At the other end of the intellectual spectrum, the philosophical, Boehm has some interesting observations to make on the concept of the portrait, analysing such terms as *effigies* and *imago* and pointing out the ambiguities in the sixteenth-century Italian use of the verb *ritrarre* (which meant to 'represent' in general rather than specifically to 'portray'). He is much concerned with the development of a genre of image which is at once autonomous and individualised. He also offers some typologies. There are, he suggests, six types of un-individualised portraits, the beautiful woman, the young man, the mature man, the sage, the saint, and Christ. There are four ways of representing individuality in portraits, two closed or inward-looking, expressing power and quiet serenity, and two open or outward-looking, expressing friendliness and amusement (there is no place for melancholy, unless 'ruhig ernst' is to be defined in a rather broad sense).

Unfortunately, Boehm does not problematise the individual to the extent that he problematises the portrait. He draws on Burckhardt but appears to be unaware of that scholar's famous *pentimento*; for in later life Burckhardt became somewhat sceptical of individualism. As he once confessed to a friend, 'Ach wisse Sie, mit dem Individualismus, i glaub ganz nimmi dra, aber i sag nit; si han gar a Fraid' (quoted from his fellow-citizen Werner Kaegi's introduction to Ernst Walsler, *Gesammelte Schriften*, Basel 1932, p.xxxvii). In any case, the idea that individualism was born during the Renaissance has been criticised by many later scholars, from Huizinga onwards. To be fair, Boehm avoids the vague term 'Individualismus' and deals only with 'Individuum' and 'Individuen'. He does engage in brief discussions of the relation between nominalism and the idea of individuality (15 f) and of the concepts 'person' and 'role' (90 f). However, he does not seriously engage with the problem of establishing how Renaissance men and women saw themselves or presented themselves, the problem of defining the 'category of the person' — to employ the useful phrase of the American anthropologist Clifford Geertz — characteristic of that particular culture. The author does not ask which social groups were aware of nominalism, or individuality, or indeed which groups sat for their portraits.

These absences suggest that Boehm follows traditional *Geistesgeschichte* in assuming the cultural unity of an age, rather than treating it (like contemporary cultural historians) as problematic. Although his book has grown out of a regional study, he has little to say about regional variation. He talks about 'die freie Individualität' in Venice as if unaware that expressions of this individuality (including images, as it happens) were considerably more restricted there than in Florence. There are other serious omissions. We learn little from this book about the 'reception' of portraits, about the views of contemporaries about the genre in general or about specific paintings (Boehm is generally unwilling to discuss literary evidence, though he is not altogether consistent in rejecting it). The author does not tell his readers why Italians of this period

commissioned portraits, or what they did with them after they had been painted. My own impression is that portraits were commissioned essentially for family reasons, particularly at the time of betrothals and weddings, that they were often intended to be either gifts or a record of particular events and relationships, and that they were generally hung in groups. What these details of social history suggest, to me at least, is that portraits reveal the Renaissance sense of family rather than the sense of the individual. The evidence from inventories, inscriptions and so on is of course fragmentary and it is open to more than one interpretation, but its relevance to the central theme of this study is such that the Renaissance family, particularly the patrician family of Venice and Florence, should not have been omitted from consideration.

This particular instance highlights a more general weakness in the presentation of Boehm's thesis. In general he does not build up an argument step by step. His method, or rhetorical strategy, is first to assert and then to illustrate, as if alternative views of this material were obviously out of the question. This weakness is perhaps associated with Boehm's strength of imagination and intuition; but it seriously limits the value of his book.

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THOMAS DACOSTA KAUFMANN, *L'École de Prague. La Peinture à la Cour de Rodolphe II*. Paris, Flammarion 1985. 335 Seiten inkl. 48 Farbtafeln, 491 Schwarz-Weiß-Abb., 650 FF.

Die rudolfnische Kunst ist in den letzten zwanzig Jahren zu einem Hauptschwerpunkt der Forschungen zur Kunst des Manierismus geworden. Als Mitte der sechziger Jahre die kritische Reaktion gegen die „Apotheose des Manierismus“ einsetzte, verlagerte sich das Interesse einiger Forscher — vielleicht war es dies auch eine Art Ausweichmanöver vor einer unergiebig gewordenen Forschungslage — auf den Prager Kunstkreis um Rudolf II. Die stagnierende stilmethodologische Diskussion wurde zugunsten eines sehr wichtigen, bis dahin erstaunlicherweise brachliegenden Bereiches der Kunstgeschichte aufgegeben.

Die tschechische Forschung, die sich mit großer Intensität und Engagement (Eliška Fučíková, Jaromir Neumann, Beket Bukovinská) dem neuen Thema widmete, profitierte auch von dem Umstand, daß Mitte der sechziger Jahre in Osteuropa der Begriff des Manierismus von seinem negativen Odium einer reaktionären Antithese der Renaissance befreit wurde. Die tschechischen Forscher gingen auch von einer verständlichen Tendenz aus, mit der rudolfnischen Kunst ein Stück mitteleuropäischer Verflechtung zurückzugewinnen und in der Landeskunstgeschichte — vielleicht manchmal etwas willkürlich — die Kluft zwischen den großen Kunstepochen der Gotik und des Spätbarock zu überbrücken. Den Auslöser für die rudolfnischen Studien bildete Lars Olof Larssons *de Vries*-Monographie (1967). Mit den wichtigen zwei *Uměni*-Heften von 1970, R. J. W. Evans' imposanter Arbeit über *Rudolf II and his World: a Study in Intellectual History* (1973) und den vielen Gemäldestudien von Jaromir Neumann in den siebziger Jahren gewann die neue Richtung an Gewicht. Der Umstand, daß die deutsche Übersetzung des