

Collecting Italian Art North of the Alps 1700-1800

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The Italian schools occupied central positions in early modern art collections, a tradition that continued through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The primacy of Italian art became a cornerstone for museum practice as well as a founding principle for the nascent art history discipline. In northern Europe, however, early modern collections of Italian art were rare and their formation slow off the mark. Among the obvious reasons were distance and religious difference; to these can be added lack of money, ambition and knowledge about the arts on the Italian peninsula. Grand Tours progressing as far as Italy were unusual among the Scandinavian nobility. Therefore, the visits to Italy of Frederik IV of Denmark, who travelled there both as crown prince (1692-1693) and as king (1708-1709), had a disproportionately large impact. In his article based on new archival research, Jesper Svenningsen describes the effect of the visits on the taste of a group of courtiers traveling with the Danish prince and traces their ensuing patronage of Italian art. Venice was a particularly important goal for the Northern visitors. The international success of monumental as well as small-scale Venetian painting in the early eighteenth century is a familiar story. Fabien Benuzzi's contribution is a study of the less-known patronage of Venetian sculpture North of the Alps, with patrons including Peter the Great, Augustus the Strong, the Earl of Carlisle and the Swedish politician, diplomat and collector Count Carl Gustaf Tessin. Taste, fashion and connoisseurship were undeniably significant components of eighteenth-century collecting; equally important for the scholarly study of its history are the personal relations, networks and financial arrangements behind patronage.

Although perhaps something of a torso, this special issue of the RIHA Journal presents new research on collecting in the North in two articles rich both in historical detail and in suggestions for new fields and themes of investigation.

Contributions to this Special Issue (to be continued):

Jesper Svenningsen

A noble circle. The vogue for collecting Italian paintings in Denmark 1690-1730

Fabien Benuzzi

Committenze europee di scultura veneziana nel Settecento. Una panoramica e alcune ipotesi di lavoro