

SUMMARY

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Florentine painting between Ficino and Savonarola

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Perceived in the light of the “bonfires of the vanities” consuming books, music instruments, and numerous works of art, the relationship between the Dominican preacher Girolamo Savonarola, and the culture and art of 15th-century Florence emerges as a head-on clash of destructive religious fanaticism with the ideas of blossoming Renaissance. The nature of these relations is, nonetheless, proven complex by the well documented cases of both eminent artists and humanists among the among *piagnoni* – the ardent supporters of the preacher from San Marco.

The title of the work emphasises the central figure of the Florentine Academy and the Dominican preacher as the activity of the two antagonists was crucial for the content and form of work of Florentine artists in the last decade of the 15th and the early 16th centuries.

The object of research are the relationships between the aesthetic theories of Marsilio Ficino and the teachings of Girolamo Savonarola, and their impact on the ideological content and stylistic features of Florentine painting. It is extended to the links connecting the ideological foundation with the manner of building images, their form and content, by painters influenced by what is broadly construed as the realm of the preacher’s impact.

The work aims at showing how the ideas of Marsilio Ficino, and the teachings and activity of Girolamo Savonarola made their mark on the content and shape of the works in question. To achieve that, it uses source texts, literature on the subject, and iconographic and stylistic analysis of multiple works of Sandro Botticelli, Filippino Lippi, Fra Bartolomeo, Lorenzo di Credi, Piero di Cosimo, Benozzo Gozzoli, Jacopo del Sellaio, and others.

The discussion extends to the relations between the realm of the Florentine Academy and the circles connected to the San Marco preacher, and the principal foundations of Ficino’s Neoplatonic philosophy are presented together with the crucial messages of Savonarola’s writings and sermons. The aesthetic concepts of the head of the Florentine Academy are compared to the aesthetic views presented in the teaching of the Dominican, with extensive

quotations from their works focusing on construing the form as an idea, autonomy of art and the artist, superiority of nature to art resulting from the divine origin of the laws of nature while the rules of art come from humans, imitation of nature by art, conviction that God himself is infinite beauty, the divine origin of such simple things as light, simplicity, intangible essence of beauty, the sublime value of spiritual beauty, the need for treating sensual beauty in the categories of mathematical proportions, and the power of impact of beauty. The texts quoted above point to the coherence of aesthetic theories of the two adversaries, proving that their conflict did not run along the line of aesthetic views. Moreover, quotes from Savonarola illustrate his interest in aesthetic issues, audacity of opinions on imitation in art, and attribution of profound significance to the notions of beauty and simplicity.

The discussion of the Dominican's impact on artists and their works involves accounts of Giorgio Vasari, and the portraits of the preacher made by his contemporary artists: Sandro Botticelli, Fra Bartolomeo and Rafael Santi, and the iconographic motifs present in the paintings of Sandro Botticelli, Lorenzo di Credi, Fra Bartolomeo, Filippino Lippi, Benozzo Gozzoli, Piero di Cosimo, Jacopo del Sellaio, and others. Subjects that reflect key aspects of Savonarola's teachings have been elicited from his writings and sermons. The interpretation of paintings especially representative of the character of religiosity of his followers presented accounts both for the religious content, and the changes of behaviour and political events they reflect. The semantic layer of the works is also analysed in a reference to the atmosphere of spirituality developed in the realm of impact of Neoplatonic philosophy.

The formal aspect of the work of Florentine painters who counted themselves among the supporters of Savonarola, and/or worked to the commissions of the members and aficionados of his faction was subjected to a style analysis. Thus selected, the material made it possible to distinguish the following range of formal features of religious paintings: heightened expression and emotionality, formal archaisation, avoidance of decorativeness, modesty and simplicity, pursuit for portraying ideal beauty, and monumentality. These features can be found in the works of the individual artists to a different degree. Heightened expression and emotionality of religious presentations is manifested in the works of Sandro Botticelli, Filippino Lippi, Fra Bartolomeo, Lorenzo di Credi, Benozzo Gozzoli, and Jacopo del Sellaio. The form is archaised in the paintings of Sandro Botticelli and Filippino Lippi, a process that is persistently deepened in Botticelli's late religious works. In turn, the works of Lorenzo di Credi and Fra Bartolomeo, as well as certain works of Botticelli and Filippino Lippi can be

construed the attainment of the ideals of beauty and simplicity in the spirit of the preacher's recommendations aligned with the Neoplatonic aesthetics. The analysis of style shows how Ficino's aesthetic concepts coupled with the teachings of Savonarola made an impact on the formal aspects of Florentine painting in the period in question.

The work also poses a question about the significance of the stylistic phenomena and ideas described for the mature Renaissance art. There are many reasons to believe that it is worthwhile to follow the aesthetic theories and ideas of both Ficino and Savonarola while analysing the works from the time.

KEYWORDS

Ficino, Savonarola, Neoplatonism, *piagnoni*, Florentine painting, essence of beauty, simplicity