

Domenichino Colorist? Malvasia, Modern Critical Reception, and a Letter to Angeloni

Abstract

Although Annibale Carracci has been championed for his synthesis of northern-Italian *colore* and central-Italian *disegno*, the innovations in *colore* of his prominent student, Domenichino, have been largely overlooked by modern critics. Yet his early biographers, Carlo Cesare Malvasia and Giovan Pietro Bellori, praised his innovations as a colorist. This essay examines three factors that have contributed to the negative assessment of Domenichino's coloring. Beginning with an analysis of how Malvasia undercut his own positive assessment of Domenichino's modernity and originality, I turn to Roger de Piles's conception of what constitutes excellence in coloring and its persistence in modern views. To counter the prevailing notion that Domenichino's letter to Francesco Angeloni was a manifesto of his anti-colorist stance, I provide a close reading of that letter and its debt to Aristotelian philosophy. The essay concludes with a brief look at Domenichino's innovations as a colorist and proposes that his originality consisted of replacing the Carraccesque model of light and dark alternations with a unique way of grouping hues and organizing color in space.