The men of letters and the teaching artists: Guattani, Minardi, and the discourse on art at the Accademia di San Luca in Rome in the nineteenth century

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The argument of whether a non-artist was qualified to write about art famously dates back as far as the Renaissance. Through their writings, Cennino Cennini (c. 1360-before 1427), Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), and Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) consolidated the auctoritas of artists by developing a theoretical discourse on art.

Two centuries later, Anton Raphael Mengs (1728-1779), who was also Prince of the Accademia di San Luca between 1771 and 1772, even achieved the title of ‘philosopher-painter.

As for men of letters, the classicist theory of the Horatian ut pictura poesis, the analogy of painting and poetry, allowed them to enter the field of art criticism. From the Renaissance onwards, the literary component came to prevail over the visual one. As Christoph Braider writes, the two terms of the equation ‘as painting, so poetry’ were ultimately reversed in ‘as poetry, so painting’, and consequently ‘it is to this reversal that we owe the most salient and far-reaching features of ut pictura aesthetics’. Invention, a purely intellectual operation of conceiving the subject (as in Aristotle’s Poetics and Rhetoric), thus rests at the base of the creative process for both poetry and painting. Consequently, due to its complex inherent features, history painting became the highest form of invention and the pinnacle of painting genres, according to the Aristotelian scheme of the Poetics (ranging from the representation of the inanimate nature to that of the human actions) as applied to the visual arts.

I am grateful to Angela Cipriani and Stefania Ventra for their comments and suggestions.

3 See in Onofrio Boni, Elogio di Pompeo Girolamo Batoni, Roma: Stamperia Pagliarini, 1787, his famous comparison with Pompeo Batoni: “Questi (Mengs) fu fatto pittore dalla filosofia”.
5 Ibid.
The statement of the ‘right of the non-painter to judge painting’, an assertive claim by the cultivated amateur Giulio Mancini (1559-1630), relied above all on the judgment of invention, which was used by non-practitioners to justify writing about art for centuries. In 1764 Winckelmann’s Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums emerged as the seminal work for both archaeology and art history due to its integration of the philological method (which was distinctive to men of letters and antiquarians) with the formal analysis of works of art. In Italy, another man of letters, Luigi Lanzi, accomplished a similar achievement in the history of painting with his Storia pittorica della Italia (1795-1796). His methodology for understanding and explaining the different artistic manners derived from his background as an antiquarian and as a critic. Lanzi writes in the preface of the Storia pittorica:

my third object was to facilitate an acquaintance with the various styles of painting. The artist or amateur indeed, who has studied the manner of all ages and every school, on meeting with a picture can very readily assign it, if not to a particular master, at least to a certain style, much as antiquarians, from a consideration of the paper and the characters, are enabled to assign a manuscript to a particular era; or as critics conjecture the age and place in which an anonymous author flourished, from his phraseology.

Similar to Luigi Lanzi (1732-1810), Giuseppe Antonio Guattani (1748-1830) was an antiquarian who was renowned for his periodical publication Memorie Enciclopediche Romane sulle Belle Arti, antichità (1806-1817). His election as Secretary and professor of history, mythology, and costumes at the newly reformed Roman Accademia di San Luca (1812) was clearly the result of a long-lasting relationship between scholars/antiquarians and artists within the institution as many of the academicians were members of the literary Accademia dell’Arcadia. This peaceful relationship was interrupted abruptly when Guattani inserted himself into the fields of art criticism and art history with his La pittura comparata as well as with a controversial review of The Death of Antigone, an unfinished painting by the late

Giuseppe Errante (1760-1821). Guattani’s works were published around 1817, the year in which courses of art theory taught by artists were included in the curriculum of the Roman academy.

This paper will address the dispute that took place at the Accademia di San Luca in the first half of the nineteenth century between men of letters and artists regarding the control over the discourse on art and the aesthetic principles themselves of the academy. These principles ultimately were determined by the artists, when Tommaso Minardi (1787-1871), a professor of painting and art theory, published a lecture, in 1834, entitled Delle qualità essenziali della pittura italiana, which outlined the history of Italian painting, promoted an artistic production rooted in the late medieval and early Renaissance art. The paper will also focus on the polarisation within the academy between the purist-Romantic tendency, which was led by Minardi, and the classicist one, which was represented by Guattani, the erudite Salvatore Betti (1792-1882), as well as the painter Vincenzo Camuccini (1771-1844).

Since the 1980s, the fundamental studies of Stefano Susinno,10 including the exhibition Maestà di Roma that was planned by the scholar before his premature death,11 have shed light on the ‘system of the Arts’ in nineteenth century Rome. His work on the Italian and foreign academies, ateliers, art market, and public exhibitions, has paved the way to a more positive evaluation of papal Rome at the time of the Restoration.12 Yet, despite an increasing literature on these subjects, the history of the Accademia di San Luca in the nineteenth century has been only partially investigated.13 This paper will also address some lesser known history aspects of the institution between the Napoleonic era and the Restoration.

10 See in particular his essays now in Stefano Susinno, Ottocento a Roma: artisti, cantieri, atelier tra età napoleonica e Restaurazione, Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana Editoriale, 2009.
12 The historiographic prejudice of a supposed decadent papal Rome, playing a peripheral role in the art world, is discussed, for example, by Giovanna Capitelli, Mecenatismo pontificio e borbonico alla vigilia dell’Unità, Roma: Viviani Editore, 2011.
A scholarly course for the artists: Guattani and his teaching of history, mythology, and costumes at the Accademia di San Luca

In 1812, when Rome was the second capital of the French Empire, the Accademia di San Luca was given a well-structured system of teachings for the first time in its long history, when the schools of drawing, painting, sculpture, architecture, anatomy, ornament, history, mythology and costumes were introduced. Before the Napoleonic age, the academy had been essentially a club of ‘gentlemen-artists’, who were primarily concerned with preserving their own privileges, such as the right of censorship on all art writings published in the Papal States, supervision of restorations of public paintings, and estimates of works of art. The aristocratic face of the academy emerged especially vividly during the solemn award ceremonies for the artistic competitions of painting, sculpture, and architecture. The teaching of art, in the second half of the eighteenth century, was limited to the Accademia del Nudo in a hall of the Palazzo dei Conservatori on the Capitoline Hill.

Under Napoleon, the centennial institution underwent a radical change and was transformed into an actual art school. The promotion of artistic production that was deeply rooted in ancient Roman history and culture was an essential component of Napoleon’s imperial ideology. It is not coincidental that the Accademia di Archeologia, which was founded in 1810, and the Accademia di San Luca were associated under the French government. They shared the same location (the Collegio dell’Apollinare, close to Piazza Navona) in addition to collaborating. The common feeling towards Roman history created constant dialogue between the
two institutions for mutual benefit. Artists and archaeologists, as members of the two academies, attended joint meetings, joint lectures, and other public events.

Figure 1 Giovanni Colombo, *The unification of the Accademia di Archeologia and the Accademia di San Luca*, 1817, fresco, Città del Vaticano: Museo Chiaramonti (Foto Copyright Musei Vaticani)

Figure 2 Francesco Hayez, *The establishment of the schools at the Accademia di San Luca under Pius VII*, 1817, fresco, Città del Vaticano: Museo Chiaramonti (Foto Copyright Musei Vaticani)

One of the lunettes of the Galleria Chiaramonti, in the Vatican Museums (fig. 1), which were frescoed by a team of painters at Antonio Canova’s expense after the return of Pius VII from exile in France (1814),\(^{19}\) shows the personification of History sitting at the foot of the Trajan’s Column with a young artist next to her. The Statutes of the Accademia di Archeologia stated ‘Archaeology serves essentially to

favour the Fine Arts making those mute ancient monuments speak’, inspiring subjects and artistic excellence. Pius VII confirmed the association of the two academies as well as the didactic system and organization given by the French to the Accademia di San Luca. A second lunette (fig. 2) by Francesco Hayez (1791-1882) shows a young artist being gently led to the entrance of the Accademia di San Luca by two characters dressed in the Roman fashion, one of them bearing a drawing of an antique statue. The message is clear, the principles of the Accademia di San Luca were rooted in the practice of drawing—a common element to the three sister arts of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture—and in the study of the Antique. However, the question of archaeological knowledge the students of the Accademia di San Luca were expected to achieve must be examined. The answer can be found in the lectures given by the antiquarian Giuseppe Antonio Guattani as part of his course on history, mythology, and costumes that he taught at the Accademia di San Luca between 1812 and 1830. Since the inauguration of the Schools in 1812, Guattani had personified the link between the two institutions and the two disciplines, especially since he had also been appointed secretary of both the Accademia di Archeologia and the Accademia di San Luca. Guattani was renowned as a respected antiquarian and especially as a brilliant divulgator, his periodical Memorie Enciclopediche Romane sulle Belle Arti, antichità illustrated both archaeological topics and contemporary artistic production with the intention of promoting the art market. He was also appointed a member of the Commission des Monuments Antiques et des Bâtiments Civils by the French government (Consulta Straordinaria per gli Stati Romani) in charge of cataloguing and preserving public monuments and artworks.

Guattani’s course of history, mythology, and costumes was aimed to help young artists ‘to well invent and protect themselves from criticism.’ It provided students with knowledge of the history, myths and costumes of various peoples of the Mediterranean region from the time of the biblical Creation to the era of Napoleon, through the study of ancient monuments, considered to be firsthand documents of history. Guattani used illustrated books such as Le Costume des peuples de l’Antiquité prouvé par les monuments by Andries Lens (1739-1822), the volumes of the Histoire Universelle, traitée relativement aux arts de peindre et de sculpter, and those of the Costume des anciens peuples, à l’usage des artistes by Michel-François Dandré...

21 Pier Paolo Racioppi, ‘‘Per bene inventare e schermirsi dalle altrui censure”: Giuseppe Antonio Guattani e l’insegnamento di Storia, mitologia e costumi all’Accademia di San Luca (1812-1830)’, in Picardi and Racioppi, Le scuole mute, 79-98
22 The first volume of the Memorie Enciclopediche Romane sulle Belle Arti, antichità was published in Rome by the Stamperia Salomoni in 1806; it was followed by four more volumes published between 1807 and 1810 by Mordacchini. After an interruption of some years, the last two volumes were published by de Romanis in 1816 and 1817.
24 ‘‘Per ben inventare e schermirsi dalle altrui censure”: Racioppi, ‘Per bene inventare’, 84-94.
Bardon (1700-1783). Guattani also lectured using the famous *Admiranda romanarum antiquitatum* by Giovan Pietro Bellori (1613-1696).\(^\text{25}\)

Guattani intended to impart an ambitious universal history for artists, rooted in the antiquarian tradition of the eighteenth century and based on the model of the *Istoria Universale* by Francesco Bianchini (1662-1729),\(^\text{26}\) according to which archaeological evidence was more reliable than literary sources. The archaeological knowledge acquired by the artists was above all historical and limited to the iconographic components of the monuments as presented in class by Guattani, excluding any stylistic analysis. The prospective history painters found monuments of antiquity to be visual documents of history and myths as well as sources for composing historical paintings, which were at the apex of the hierarchy of painting genres, with great philological accuracy.

In Neoclassical art theory, the term invention is subject to semantic oscillations. According to Mengs it is the ‘poetry of painting. It is the first idea of a work’,\(^\text{27}\) whereas for Francesco Milizia (1725-1798), who was often quoted by Guattani in his works, invention is not to copy faithfully and coldly what is before one’s eyes, but to discover, develop, discern, grasp, and bring together that which is not seen by the majority of men, but which nevertheless constitutes an ideal whole, interesting and new, formed by the union of things known, or else a whole that already exists, but purified of all defects and ornamented with new graces and beauties.\(^\text{28}\)

However, in Guattani’s lectures, the category of invention is stripped of its aesthetic implications and reduced to a correct depiction of those ‘things known, that already exist’ as mentioned by Milizia: the ‘things known’ are the myths and the historical subjects carved or painted on ancient monuments together with the literary sources. Guattani had expressed the intention of publishing his lectures alongside the engravings of the monuments presented in class, yet three volumes without illustrations ending with the age of Justinian and not with the Napoleonic period, as he had initially planned, were published only in 1838 after his death.\(^\text{29}\)

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
\(^{26}\) Francesco Bianchini, *Istoria Universale provata con monumenti e figurata con simboli degli Antichi*, Roma: Antonio de Rossi, 1697.
Elements of art history at the Accademia di San Luca: Guattani and his *La pittura comparata*

It was through his teaching that Guattani was inspired to write *La pittura comparata nelle opere principali di tutte le scuole* between 1813 and 1816; Guattani defined his work as a pictorial encyclopedia addressed to artists but also to *amateurs.*\(^\text{30}\) Guattani’s work focused on comparing the different inventions that were adopted by painters of ancient Greece and Rome as well as those of the modern era (from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century) in depicting the same subject. *La pittura comparata* was published and sold in instalments of small format (*in octavo*) that were later collected in one volume.\(^\text{31}\) It included the reproductions of sixty-two paintings with their associated commentary: ancient frescoes from Ercolano, works by Raffaello, Michelangelo, Domenichino, Poussin, Rubens, Guercino, Le Sueur, Reni, Caravaggio, Gerrit van Honthorst, Dürer, Parmigianino, and Correggio. At that time, most of these paintings were displayed in Napoleon’s Louvre. The artists who preceded the Renaissance, the so-called primitives, were not considered worthy of inclusion in *La pittura comparata* by the strictly classicist Guattani, despite the growing appreciation for them in France.\(^\text{32}\)

With the help of the outlined prints engraved by Stanislao Morelli (1798–?), Guattani verifies the ‘philological correctness’ of historical and religious paintings by focusing on the analysis of attributes, costumes, and architectural details. Portraits, landscapes, and genre paintings were all excluded from the book; history painting was the only genre deemed worthy of being included according to the rules of the classicist hierarchy. However, Guattani’s analysis is neither limited to the detection of mistakes, such as anachronistic details or incorrect attributes, nor to the praise of the artist that had correctly depicted a shield or a Greek temple since it also included composition and style. Therefore, Guattani’s concept of invention is much broader than the purely iconographic one set out in his course of history, mythology and costumes.

Guattani goes well beyond iconographic analysis in comparing the three different interpretations of the myth of Perseus and Andromeda by the ancient painter from Herculaneum, Paolo Veronese, and Annibale Carracci. In Veronese’s version (fig. 3), he criticizes the lack of Medusa’s head, the erroneous shape of the sword of Perseus, the absence of Pegasus, but he shows his appreciation for the work, ‘an excellent painting’ due to its well-structured composition.\(^\text{33}\) Guattani praises the correctness in Carracci’s depiction of Perseus riding Pegasus with Medusa’s head (fig. 4), faithful to the narration of the myth according to Pausanias’


\(^\text{31}\) It was reprinted in 1822 and, again, in 1828, the latter with the addition of fourteen more plates with a different title: *La pittura comparata nelle opere principali delle migliori scuole con incisioni a contorno illustrate da G.A. Guattani*, Roma: Francesco Bourlié.


version, but he criticizes the inappropriate presence of Andromeda’s parents Cepheus and Cassiopeia. The painting also demonstrates his knowledge of form and expression.\textsuperscript{34} Despite his appreciation for the works of Veronese and Carracci, the declared winner of this comparison is the painter from Herculaneum (fig. 5), because, along with the correctness of the narrative elements, the ancient artist had employed ‘a simplicity of style, a quietness and an elegance of shapes’ attesting ‘the superiority of the Greek masters.’\textsuperscript{35}

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This example is one of the few comparisons in the entire \textit{La pittura comparata} in which Guattani establishes an explicit ranking of merit. However, Guattani

\textsuperscript{34} Guattani, \textit{La pittura comparata}, 34.

\textsuperscript{35} ‘una semplicità di stile, un riposo, un’eleganza di forme’ attesting ‘la superiorità de’Greci maestri’: Guattani, \textit{La pittura comparata}, 30.
praises the ancient Greek painters, Raphael, and the classicist artists in general most frequently. To enhance the validity of his comments, Guattani mentions the opinions of renowned authors, such as Giorgio Vasari, Luigi Lanzi, Francesco Milizia, and Filippo Baldinucci (1624-1697). He even cites less expected sources such as the *Discourses* by Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) and the *Lettres sur l’Italie* by Mercier Dupaty (1746-1788), thereby providing the essential bibliography for most of the works.

In his autobiography, Guattani talks about the criticism that was incited by his *La pittura comparata*, which was expressed in anonymous letters sent to the president of the Accademia di San Luca, the architect Andrea Vici (1743-1817) who, nevertheless, encouraged Guattani to continue the publication. According to Guattani, the criticism was due to the ‘envy for such a beautiful project’. La pittura comparata was indeed an innovative art publication—notwithstanding its limitations, especially the rather poor quality of its illustrations—and it is likely that it might have aroused envy among artists and men of letters as well. It was innovative as one of the first examples of cultural divulgation, an illustrated art book presenting masterpieces of different periods and of different schools, including the Flemish, Dutch and French paintings on display in Bonaparte’s Louvre, most of them unfamiliar to the majority of the Roman audience.

These reproductions and their associated comments were now available to the artists and to the amateurs at an affordable price. *La pittura comparata* was a publication that was very different from the large, luxurious and expensive illustrated volumes printed in folio, ‘books treated as luxurious fancy goods’, which amateurs did not even dare to open in order not to damage them. For its format, low price, and structure of side-by-side plate and text, *La pittura comparata* was comparable to the successful contemporary illustrated publications of Napoleon’s Louvre, and in particular to the *Annales du Musée* by Charles-Paul Landon (1760-1826), which was the most likely source of inspiration for Guattani’s work. Many of the outlined engravings of *La pittura comparata* are faithful reproductions of the plates of the *Annales* by Landon, most of which were engraved by Charles Normand (1765-1840).

The outlined engravings, used in both publications, offered the advantage of better emphasizing the invention of the artist, as Landon wrote: ‘the conception of

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36 Guattani, *La pittura comparata*, 204.
the artist, the disposition of the scene [...] the invention, the character, the movement, the expression’. The miscellaneous rather than systematic nature of Landon’s Annals, presenting contemporary artworks mixed with paintings and statues of Bonaparte’s Louvre, must have encouraged Guattani to freely ‘play’ with artworks that were so different with regard to chronological and geographical context. It was an innovative approach to art history that ignored the ‘philosophical genius of this age [...] which requires systematic arrangement’ on which the Storia pittorica by Luigi Lanzi, organized by regional artistic schools in chronological order, is based. The cosmopolitan Guattani, who had lived in Paris for several years and who had visited the universal museum of Napoleon, must have been fascinated by that miscellany of wonders as reflected in the miscellany of masterpieces presented in his book. However, the criticism to La pittura comparata was triggered by the perceived encroachment of a man of letters on the territory of the art theory taught at the Accademia di San Luca by painters, sculptors and architects, as will be discussed below.

As early as the beginning of the nineteenth century, the institutional position of the artists had been strongly consolidated in all fields of fine arts in Rome, such as museums, administration and conservation of the cultural heritage, which had previously been the prerogative of antiquarians and men of letters. The same phenomenon had happened in Revolutionary France. Antonio Canova (1757-1822) was appointed director of Roman museums under the French and, later, at the time of the Papal Restoration, the Accademia di San Luca was in charge of looking after the ancient monuments. The painter Vincenzo Camuccini became the curator of the Vatican Pinacoteca as well as the Inspector of Public Paintings in Rome. Furthermore, in 1796, the Accademia di San Luca had been granted the privilege of censorship in the field of art publications in Rome and the Papal States, even though this right was rarely exercised.

43 ‘il genio filosofico dell’età nostra [...] che richiede sistema’: Lanzi, The history of painting in Italy, vol. I, V.
44 See, among many examples, the enthusiastic response to the Louvre of Mary Berry in Cecil Gould, Trophy of Conquest: The Musée Napoleon and the Creation of the Louvre, London: Faber & Faber, 1965, 80.
47 Ronald T. Ridley, The Eagle and the Spade: Archaeology in Rome During the Napoleonic Era, 78-79.
As long as Guattani’s discourse on art had been limited to Greek and Roman monuments and their iconography, he had not been criticized. Once he started analyzing the inventions of modern paintings in the broader sense of the term (including composition, expression, and colouring) and establishing hierarchies of merit according to the classicist principles, he immediately met with the criticism of the artists. Guattani writes in his La pittura comparata: ‘If sometimes I have expressed my opinions [on the artworks], it shouldn’t be interpreted as an offence to the Arts, since I write with modesty and the approval of the painters.’ By opinions, Guattani meant his analysis of the paintings in their iconographic and stylistic components as well as the primacy granted to the classicist artists, like Raphael and the ancient Greek painters. It is likely that the author of those anonymous letters mentioned by Guattani was Gaspare Landi (1756-1830), a professor of painting at the Accademia di San Luca; in these very same years, Landi became professor of a new course: painting and art theories.

The new course of painting and art theories at the Accademia di San Luca (1817)

1817 marked the first time that the teaching of art theory appeared in the statutes of the academy. Within the Accademia di San Luca, the instruction on theoretical principles regarding the arts was the prerogative of the artists: therefore, La pittura comparata, probably used by Guattani during his lectures of history, mythology, and costumes, must have been seen with suspicion by the presiding ‘theorists-artists’ of the academy. The exact contents of the course of art theory and painting taught by Landi are still unclear. In a letter sent to Cardinal Bartolomeo Pacca, Protector of the Accademia di San Luca, Landi mentions the teaching of elements of composition, colouring and, very generically, art theory; in the same letter, he complains about the lack of paintings and art books, useful for ‘compositions, costumes and different subjects’. It seems likely that some of the theoretical teachings of the professor of painting ended up by overlapping with those of history, mythology and costumes. Some classes were held in the Picture Gallery of the Capitoline Museums and in the Galleria di Santa Martina (the Pinacoteca of the Accademia di San Luca). It is likely that during these on-site classes, Landi and, later, Tommaso Minardi would introduce students to elements of the history of Italian art through few exemplary paintings.

La pittura comparata was interrupted when only sixty-two artworks were published, instead of the four hundred paintings that had been planned at the

50 ‘se talvolta ci facciamo lecito il dirne qualche nostro parere, non è questa una ferita che si faccia all’Arte, tanto più che nulla si avanza se non con modestia, e salva l’approvazione dei Sigg. Pittori’: Guattani, La pittura comparata, 151-152.
52 ‘per la composizione, i costumi; dei differenti soggetti’: Corbo, ‘L’insegnamento artistico a Roma’, 100-101.
beginning of this enterprise, an interruption due, according to Guattani, to the ‘tiredness of my engraver friend’.  

However, Guattani had a second important chance to write about art: the illustrated catalogue of the Vatican Pinacoteca, published in 1820, after the return from Paris of the artworks that had been confiscated by the French in Rome and Umbria after the Treaty of Tolentino of 1797.  

Guattani was evidently still considered the publicist *par excellence* in Rome; furthermore, he had already written, along with the antiquarian Filippo Aurelio Visconti (1754-1831), the catalogue of another section of the Vatican Museums, the recently inaugurated Museo Chiaromonti of classical antiquities.

The criteria adopted by the curator of the Vatican Pinacoteca, the painter Vincenzo Camuccini, for the display of the paintings were purely aesthetic and based on a selection of masterpieces of the highest quality, neither arranged in chronological order nor according to schools.  

Yet in his catalogue, Guattani follows the method of presenting the paintings in chronological order as in Luigi Lanzi’s *Storia pittorica*, which Guattani frequently quotes in the text. His approach in the description of the artworks is similar to the one of *La pittura comparata*, characterized by a concise iconographical and stylistic analysis supported by the authority of eminent authors such as Vasari, Baldinucci and Lanzi.

Meanwhile the Accademia di San Luca was passing through a period of intense renovations: in 1822, Tommaso Minardi was appointed a professor of drawing, finding a strong supporter in Antonio Canova, president of the academy and, above all, in Gaspare Landi.  

The lively, charismatic personality of this young and talented draughtsman had deeply impressed the students of the academy. Minardi brought fresh air into an institution dominated by classicist painters such as Vincenzo Camuccini and Jean-Baptiste Wicar (1762-1834), who were painting in the tradition of the French grand style of Jacques Louis David whom Minardi had dared to criticize.  

Minardi became a leading figure in the movement of the purists who, like the German Nazarenes, sought to return to the formal values of the early Renaissance Italian art in combination with a closer observation of nature that was also imbued with a deep sense of religiosity.  

Gaspare Landi established an effective partnership with Minardi. According to Wicar, who had firmly opposed the election of Minardi, Landi used to hire the younger colleague and former pupil

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to draw the figures in his paintings, because Landi was renowned as a talented colourist but he was a rather weak draughtsman.\textsuperscript{61}

**Guattani’s controversial review of Giuseppe Errante’s *Death of Antigone* (1824)**

In 1824, Guattani was asked to publish a review on an unfinished painting by the deceased Sicilian Giuseppe Errante, *The Death of Antigone* (fig. 6).\textsuperscript{62} His widow, wishing to sell the work, needed the help of the brilliant publicist Guattani for the promotion of the painting on the art market. Guattani’s appreciation for the composition of the *Death of Antigone* and his admiration for an artist that had devoted his art only to great historical compositions instead of portraits and other minor subjects, sparked a strong reaction on the part of Odoardo Franceschi, the pseudonym of Melchiorre Missirini (1773-1849), who was the new secretary of the Accademia di San Luca (from 1822 to 1828) and the biographer of Antonio Canova.\textsuperscript{63}

In a short letter, Franceschi/Missirini attacked Guattani, firstly for the primacy granted to the great historical paintings, secondly for defining Giuseppe

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\textsuperscript{61} Susinno and Scarpati, *Disegni*, 75; Letter of Wicar to the General Secretary of the Camerlengato, (February 23, 1822) in Corbo, ‘Tommaso Minardi e la scuola romana di San Luca’, 135-136.


\textsuperscript{63} His true identity is revealed by the painter Ferdinando Boudard in a letter addressed to Pietro de Lama published by Carlo Monaco, ‘Le lettere da Roma di Ferdinando Boudard a Pietro de Lama dal 1821 al 1824’, in *Archivio storico per le Provincie Parmensi*, 1953, 297-298.
Errante a great colourist. In 1816, Errante had published the controversial Lettera sui colori, which had met the harshest criticism of the Accademia di San Luca and had been condemned by the immediate application of the academy’s right of censorship. His assertion that ‘the true art of painting is easy and secure; in six months anyone who might have never painted in colours could learn to do it’ must have disconcerted the academicians, above all Gaspare Landi, who served as the President of the Accademia from 1817 to 1819 and who was deemed the greatest colourist at the time in Rome. Therefore, the presence of Gaspare Landi himself and maybe also that of Tommaso Minardi are easily traceable behind Franceschi/Missirini, who would have found Guattani’s words offensive for blaming artists for wasting their talent on painting portraits or other minor subjects, instead of great historical compositions. As early as the beginning of the century, small-format paintings, such as landscapes, portraits and neo-Flemish and troubadour paintings, which appealed to the taste of bourgeois customers, had officially entered the public exhibitions, such as the one held in the Campidoglio in 1809. The position of Guattani appeared obsolete in the eyes of the contemporary artists. Guattani replied with a letter affirming his conviction about the superiority of history painting and defending his theories concerning the compositional aspects by quoting the principles of Mengs and Milizia.

Meanwhile, within the Accademia di San Luca, Guattani was experiencing a gradual deterioration of his position: he was no longer the secretary of the institution, and very few students were enrolled in his class of history, mythology, and costumes even though the course was mandatory for students of painting and sculpture. Guattani, nevertheless, took no action, unlike Salvatore Betti who took over Guattani’s teaching after his death in 1830. In fact, the classicist Betti, new secretary of the academy and founder of the periodical Giornale Arcadico, a stronghold of the strictest classicism in literature and art against the new Romantic tendencies, demanded the immediate response of the academy, and it was thus established that students not attending the course of history, mythology, and costumes would not be allowed to take part in the annual artistic contests. It seems no coincidence that Tommaso Minardi, who was the professor of drawing, painting, and art theory at the time, was absent during this faculty meeting.

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64 Published by Francesco Cancellieri, ed., Ristampa di due lettere.
66 Francesco Cancellieri, ed., Ristampa di due lettere, 10. This privilege had been already granted to the academy in 1795 but it had been rarely applied: see Silvagni, ‘L’Accademia di San Luca’.
67 ‘L’Arte vera di dipingere è facile e sicura. In sei mesi può essere istruito chiunque non abbia dipinto mai a colori’: Errante, Lettera, 12.
69 Cancellieri, ed., Ristampa di due lettere, 14-24.
70 Racioppi, ‘Per bene inventare’, 95
71 Ibidem.
The new star of the Accademia di San Luca: Tommaso Minardi, artist and man of letters

By the time Guattani died, Minardi had already become the most influential member of the Accademia di San Luca. He had successfully promoted a reform of the content of the course of painting aimed at the study of the early Renaissance Italian art combined with a closer observation of Nature. He taught three courses—drawing, painting and art theory—all on his own between 1829 and 1836, and his influence became greater and greater, culminating with his election as president of the academy in 1837. Minardi’s extensive knowledge of the history of Italian art was above all due to his being a member (since 1820) of the Commissione Ausiliaria Antichità e Belle Arti della Delegazione di Perugia and later (1822) of the Commissione Centrale Antichità e Belle Arti, in Rome, in charge of cataloguing, inspecting and preserving antiquities as well as artworks in the churches and convents of the States of the Church. It was due to this appointment that he became acquainted, in particular, with the art of the Umbrian primitives and the young Raphael.

Once he was appointed Director of the Accademia di Perugia (1819), Minardi introduced monthly conferences on art theory held by professors of the academy, and he himself used to lecture there as he would do at the Accademia di San Luca in the following years. In 1834, Minardi gave a lecture before the members of both the Accademia di Archeologia and the Accademia di San Luca at the annual joint conference of the two institutions; it was unusual to have an artist deliver a speech within that solemn context, usually reserved to men of letters and antiquarians. The title of his lecture was Delle qualità essenziali della pittura italiana dal suo rinascimento fino all’epoca della perfezione. It can be regarded as the summa of the art-theoretical principles taught in his course of painting and art theories, firmly rooted in the history of Italian painting. Minardi discusses the highest achievements of its most relevant protagonists, that is to say those who had contributed the most to the development of the art of painting, according to Vasari’s historiographical,

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72 See his proposal of reform in Picardi, ‘Spazi e strumenti didattici’, 206-212.
73 Susinno and Scarpati, Disegni di Tommaso Minardi, 84.
76 Ovidi, Tommaso Minardi, 172.
77 Minardi’s notes on art-theoretical principles, probably meant to be developed in his lectures at the academy, can be found in Archivio di Stato di Roma, Fondo Ovidi-Minardi, folders 12 and 13.
evolutionary model. He starts from the thirteenth century, with Giotto and his mastery in depicting the expression of the human passions, based on a natural, spontaneous and simplified language. He passes to Masaccio, whose language is characterized by the progress in the execution, made more and more perfected, and proceeds to the times of Leonardo da Vinci, Raffaello, Tiziano and Michelangelo, the artists of the age of perfection.78

This periodization mirrors the stages of learning according to Minardi’s teaching system at the Accademia di San Luca where students, after the acquisition of principles of geometry and perspective, would learn to draw from the exact and simplified forms of the paintings of the Quattrocento, the ‘Golden Age’ of Italian art, as defined by Minardi79. The term invention, so dear to the man of letters Guattani and the classicist painters, appears only twice in the entire lecture, and related to ‘subjects more interesting to the human heart’ like those painted by Giotto80. Much more relevance is now given to the aesthetic category of expression defined by Minardi as ‘that light which is the most important for art, the soul of art itself’, conveying spiritual and moral feelings.81

Minardi also addresses the issue of whether or not a non-artist was qualified to write about art, but without providing an answer to this dilemma, ‘I shall not be so bold as to give my answer in your presence’; but in the next lines he adds:

but since in order to arrive at a just idea of the means necessary to function in art and to judge them well, one must observe how art is born and what causes have hindered or encouraged it, I intend to speak to you only of this, and I shall limit myself strictly to my own art.82

However, outside the Accademia di San Luca, Minardi freely expressed his opinion on the matter, as when he judged the art histories of Seroux d’Agincourt (1730-1814), Luigi Lanzi, and Leopoldo Cicognara (1767-1834) to be ‘mutilated works’,83 written by men of letters not introduced into the ‘secrets’ of the art practice.84 It is

78 Tommaso Minardi, Delle qualità essenziali della pittura italiana dal suo rinascimento fino all’epoca della perfezione, s.l., s.n., 1834.
79 See his proposal of reform in Picardi, ‘Spazi e strumenti didattici’, 209. See also Susinno, ‘Introduzione’ in Susinno and Scarpati, Disegni di Tommaso Minardi, XXVI-XXVII.
82 ‘Non sarò tanto ardito di dar sentenza su ciò alla presenza vostra’ […] ‘ma siccome per conseguire una giusta idea dei mezzi opportuni ad operare nell’arte, e per ben giudicarne, è necessario osservare come questa sia nata, e da quali cause abbia avuto danno o incremento, di questo solo intendo parlare, e mi limiterò più strettamente all’arte mia’: Minardi, Delle qualità essenziali, 8. English translation: Taylor, Nineteenth Century, 177.
84 ‘segreti dei rispettivi magisteri pratici’. For Seroux d’Agincourt see Ilaria Miarelli Mariani, Seroux d’Agincourt e l’histoire de l’art par les monumens: riscoperta del Medioevo, dibattito
not a coincidence that the pamphlet *Del Purismo nelle arti* (1842)—better known as ‘manifesto del Purismo’—signed by Minardi, Friedrich Overbeck (1789-1869), and Pietro Tenerani (1789-1869) was written by a pupil of Minardi, Antonio Bianchini (1803-1884), who was himself a painter, although better known as a theorist and a writer. The refined eloquence of Minardi epitomized ‘the tie between an artist and a man of letters’ according to Francesco Massi (1804-1884), a professor of history and eloquence at the Roman University.85

**Conclusion**

Ernesto Ovidi (1845-1915) defined the 1830s, when Minardi was professor of painting and art theory as well as the president of the institution (1837), as the most flourishing period in the history of the Accademia di San Luca.86 These years witnessed the success achieved by the artists in regaining, as at the time of the philosopher-painter Mengs, the control over the discourse on art and, therefore, over the aesthetic principles themselves of the academy. It was in these very same years that Minardi proposed as accademico di merito the German Nazarene Friedrich Overbeck, who joined the institution in 1831, after the initial opposition of the classicist artists Andrea Pozzi (1777-1837), Vincenzo Camuccini, Jean-Baptiste Wicar, Filippo Agricola (1795-1857) and the secretary and professor of history, mythology and costumes Salvatore Betti.87 Yet, Minardi’s presidency lasted only one year due to his intolerance of rules - mainly concerning administrative issues - as well as his frequent contrasts with Betti, defined by Ovidi as an ‘autocrat’.88 It is likely that these contrasts concerned, above all, their different aesthetic views. Minardi’s Purism had already conquered the Accademia di San Luca by then although without fully undermining the classicist foundations of the institution.89 Thus Salvatore Betti continued his teaching of history, mythology and costumes for well more than forty years90 like Tommaso Minardi, who held his course of painting...
and art theory until 1854,\textsuperscript{91} though not without some divergences with the rest of the faculty, as when he complained about the lack of a coherent educational system.\textsuperscript{92}

No course of aesthetics and/or art history was ever introduced at the Accademia di San Luca unlike at other Italian academies.\textsuperscript{93} In 1873, after the Italian Unification, the minister of Education Antonio Scialoja (1817-1877) founded the Istituto di Belle Arti, depriving the Accademia (reduced, essentially, to an advisory body in the field of the Fine Arts) of the teaching of art.\textsuperscript{94} It was only from that time onwards that a course of art history, which was taught by the erudite and painter Basilio Magni (1831-1925) appeared in the Statutes of the new Istituto, along with other scholarly courses such as literature and history.\textsuperscript{95}

Guattani’s \textit{La pittura comparata} and Minardi’s \textit{Delle qualità essenziali della pittura italiana} can be regarded as two of the most significant theoretical contributions to the nineteenth-century Accademia di San Luca. Guattani sought to preserve tradition, according to paradigms rooted in the classics, whereas Minardi reshaped the cultural policies of the academy according to new aesthetic principles of Purism.

Both Guattani and Minardi—the first during the era of Napoleon\textsuperscript{96} and the second during the Papal Restoration—had acquired a deep knowledge of art history through their direct, daily contact with its monuments, above all due to their appointments as members of governmental commissions in charge of cataloguing and preserving monuments and artworks of the Papal State. It was this knowledge and the awareness of the historic and aesthetic values of the cultural heritage that enabled them to shape a theoretical discourse on the firm foundations of the history of art.

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\textsuperscript{91} Susinno and Scarpati, \textit{Disegni di Tommaso Minardi}, 92.
\textsuperscript{92} Ovidi, \textit{Tommaso Minardi}, 54.
\textsuperscript{94} It was followed by the official protest of the academicians: see Angela Cipriani and Marisa Dalai Emiliani, ‘Premessa’, in Picardi and Racioppi, \textit{Le scuole mute}, 8.
\textsuperscript{96} See note 23.