Bianchi Bandinelli, Ranuccio [Count]

Date born: 1900

Place born: Sienna, Italy

Date died: 1975

Place died: Rome, Italy

Bianchi Bandinelli was descended from ancient aristocracy in Siena. His father, Mario Bianchi Bandinelli (1859-1930), was a one-time mayor of Siena and land baron whose forebears included Pope Alexander III (served 1159-1181). His mother, Margherita Ottile "Lily" von Korn (Bianchi Bandinelli) (1878-1905) was German from minor noble lineage. He attended the liceo Guicciardini in Siena before entering the University in Rome in 1918, studying archaeology. His early research focused on the Etruscan centers close to his family lands. In 1924 he married Maria Garrone. His thesis, on the Etruscan town of Chiusi (Clusium), appeared in 1926. Another article followed on the Etruscan town of Suana (Sovana) in 1929. He joined the faculty at the Università di Cagliari in 1929 and the following year, University of Pisa. Bianchi Bandinelli sold his family's estate in 1934 after the death of his father, except for a smaller home, the villa Geggiano, where he would live to devote himself entirely to archaeology. He worked at the Museo archeologico in Florence, mapping the Etruscan sites. Between 1931-1933 he taught at the University in classical archeology at Groningen, the Netherlands. In 1935, he and Carlo Ragghinati founded the journal Critica d'Arte which, unlike other art journals, was open to all areas of art history, classical to modern. Important contributors to the journal included Roberto Longhi. He was appointed professor at the University in Florence in 1938, but with this, required to take an oath of fascism. His duties during this time including giving a tour of classical objects to Hitler and Mussolini. At the invitation of the German art historian Gerhart Rodenwaldt, Bianchi Bandinelli mounted a conference in Berlin on classical archaeology. His disgust with fascism in Italy grew and he declined to be present for a similar tour for Hermann Goering. His Storicità dell'arte classica, 1943, began a personal interest comprehensive art histories of the classical world. He converted to communism after World War II, and, as an anti-fascist, was appointed to a number of important art-historical positions immediate after the war. This included director of the new government's fine arts and antiquities (Antichità e Belle Arti, Ministerio della Pubblica Istruzione, 1945-1948). As a public official, Bianchi Bandinelli worked to separate Italy's reputation as a fascist country from its art reputation by loaning works to international exhibitions. He quelled post-war fears in Italy when Italian newspapers published erroneous reports that the Allies would demand art treasures from Italy as war reparations. From his chairs at the university of Florence and later Rome, he directed the new breed of Italian archaeologists sensitive to classical history based upon dialectical materialism. He also taught at the university of Groeningen. In the 1950's he returned to his idea of a comprehensive text on classical art for the general, educated public. He founded the Enciclopedia dell'arte antica in 1958. In the mid 1960s, Bianchi Bandinelli was commissioned to write the two volumes on Roman art for the important French Arts of Mankind series. These works brought his writing to a larger audience and helped usher in social criteria for classical art history to a larger and English-speaking audience. In 1967 he founded the periodical Dialoghi di archeologia with his students, one of the most innovative, if controversial, periodicals on classical archaeology. His students included Giovanni Becatti, Antonio Giuliano, Mario Torelli (b. 1937), Andrea Caladnrini (b. 1937) and Filippo Coarelli (b. 1936).
His memoir of fascism in Italy was published after his death in 1995.

Bianchi Bandinelli brought a scholarly brand of Marxism to the world of art history in the early 1970s. Eschewing so-called "crass Marxist" analysis, his work, most clearly in his English translations of surveys of Roman art, brought his wider set of criteria to English-speaking audiences. His early work on the relationship of Roman art to Greece and Etruscan art drew from the writings of Alois Reigl and Franz Wickhoff. His singular interpretations of art—not always compelling—were amply grounded. He viewed the Belvedere Apollo, for example—a Roman copy of a Greek original now thought to be second century—hailed by most art historians as a work the original of which was by Leochares, as a frigid copy of a Hellenistic work without relation to the master. His magazine Critica d'Arte became the model for other Italian art magazines, most notably Prospettiva, founded by Giovanni Previtali and Mauro Cristofani (1941-1997). Bianchi Bandinelli's family castle in Siena was used as a backdrop in the film 1950 film The Deported by Robert Siodmak (1900-1973).

Home Country: Italy


SOURCE: DICTIONARY OF ART HISTORIANS