

stake. What emerges is a fresh picture of women's agency and abilities to effect social, political, and religious change.

Chapters 5 and 6 deftly handle those thorny issues which scholars of women's writing often grapple with. Chapter 5 ventures to provide a new response to that question, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" In order to answer this, Winston-Allen surveys the scribal activity associated with Observant reform and analyses women as translators, composers, and compilers of texts. She concludes, at least for religious women, there was a fifteenth-century flowering of intellectual activity. The extensive picture which Winston-Allen presents of literary cross-pollination among geographically diffuse houses is a subject highly suggestive of future research. Her description of an inter-library loan system between women's houses is particularly interesting.

Chapter 6 grapples with that difficult question of whether pre-modern women writers possessed a distinctively female voice. To do so, Winston-Allen compares parallel works written by both men and women during the fifteenth century. Winston-Allen concludes, as have previous scholars, that women's literary voices are distinct particularly in their immediacy and use of the vernacular. She departs from previous scholarship, however, by concluding that women's writing is not as inwardly focussed as has been previously asserted. In fact, many of the works she studies were composed by nuns for the consumption of a lay audience.

This highly readable study deftly handles these difficult issues and suggests numerous avenues for further research. What is most interesting, however, is how clearly the women's voices surveyed in this work echo those of contemporaneous women writers across a wide geographic area (in particular those on the Italian peninsula). Thus, perhaps one of the most important observations Winston-Allen makes is contained in the conclusion: that "more inclusive interdisciplinary studies need to be undertaken that will encompass new geographical and linguistic categories." (238).

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Wollesen, Jens T. *Hasten to my Aid and Counsel ... The Answers of the Pictures: Private Devotional Panel Painting in Italy around 1300*. Ottawa: Legas, 2005. xii, 321 pp., 96 ill. ISBN 1-894508-63-7.

From the end of the thirteenth century, private individuals increasingly commissioned small singular panels, folding diptychs, and triptychs, for the stimulation of personal religious devotion. Most likely, these precious little panels were displayed and used within the confines of a private residence or, considering their small, portable size, carried by their owner on his or her travels. Over the last decade, art historians have begun to turn their attention to these previously

overlooked images, applying a “*Kunstgeschichte nach Aufgaben*” methodological approach which had, until recently, been more often employed for the well-studied altarpiece.

Jens Wollesen has taken up the topic, restricting himself to small, private panels, mostly of Tuscan origin, that date from the late Duecento and early Trecento. Wollesen sets out to explore the form and content of these private paintings, relating them to their “authoritative” and “official” relatives, the large-scale altarpiece and the Byzantine icon. He argues that although these private devotional images reflect the iconography of their public, liturgical counterparts, by virtue of their small size and personal nature, artists were free to “reprocess” and “adapt” official church iconography to suit the individual needs and tastes of their private patrons. In fact, Wollesen contends that it was this new class of patron—more than the artist—who played a pivotal part in the transformation of established iconographical motifs, moving images beyond their customary liturgical function.

Wollesen begins his study in a rather unorthodox manner, attempting to parallel the emergence of private devotional panel painting around 1300 with present-day interactive, multimedia and the development of the internet. He devotes several pages to a reading of Marshall McLuhan’s *Understanding Media, The Extensions of Man*, and arrives at the conclusion that to understand these private devotional images successfully one must first “focus on society, that is to say the *users*, or what McLuhan called the ‘environment’ ... and then continue on [to] the pictorial issues of the new medium” (p. 22). To familiarize his readers with the new features of these small, privately owned devotional panels, he examines a slightly later and comparatively large panel of the *Virgin with Saints Catherine of Alexandria and Zenobius* (c. 1334) from the Museo dell’Opera del Duomo, Florence. He suggests that this panel, which may have had a semi-private devotional function, was commissioned by a member of the Compagnia di Santa Maria Reparata to be used as the “pictorial focus of the *laudes* and processions of [the] brotherhood” (p. 38). Wollesen discusses the iconographic peculiarities of the Museo dell’Opera panel, most notably the representation and function of donor figures, an important theme that runs throughout his book. He concludes this introductory section with a general chapter dedicated to icons, altarpieces and devotional panel paintings, with the objective of providing an overview of the social and visual context informing the “new medium” of the private devotional panel.

The majority of Wollesen’s book is devoted to an exploration of several private devotional images that for the most part, have escaped recent in-depth study. Wollesen categorizes his panels into several distinct iconographic categories. In particular, he considers those panels that reflect “official pictorial formulae,” such as the now-lost Stoclet Madonna, arguing its relationship to the famous Byzantine prototype, the *Hodegetria* Madonna. The remaining categories treat

panels that include saints, saints and/or scenes, supplicant portraits, and supplicants or saints “in dialogue” with the Virgin or Christ. This last category involves a discussion of the charming little *Madonna of the Three Franciscans* attributed to Duccio and located in the Pinacoteca, Siena. Wollesen argues that this panel was made for and used by French Franciscan friars living in Cyprus, finding evidence for his theory in the panel’s *schutzmantle*-composition which he believes was influenced by an “official” image of a *Madonna and Child* formally in the Church of St. Cassianus in Nicosia. Wollesen does not address the possible effects of his theory on the attribution to Duccio and his Siennese workshop. Presumably, he intentionally overlooks this question for, as he states throughout his study, he is not concerned with the traditional history of art and the inherent issues of connoisseurship associated with the discourse. Alternatively, he is concerned with matters of form and function; questions such as who used private devotional panels, how did the needs and tastes of patrons transform established iconographical motifs, and, importantly, how would small painted panels function in the context of private, personal meditation?

The questions posed by Wollesen are important and his emphasis on the function of private devotional panels is a welcome approach, continuing as it does a line of inquiry that informs some of the most current and interesting research in late medieval panel painting. Most notably, in his conclusions, Wollesen grapples with the relationship between books of hours and private devotional panels, as well as the relationship between words—both spoken and written—and images. The body of Wollesen’s study is followed by three appendices and a catalogue of the thirteen painted panels that form the body of images discussed in his main text. Beyond this there are 96 additional black and white illustrations of varying quality.

Wollesen’s study is ambitious and contributes to the burgeoning academic discussions on private devotional panel painting. However, it should be pointed out that there are a few short-comings that detract from the general success of this book. First, despite the extensive bibliography, Wollesen has overlooked some of the most recent literature dealing with the function of private devotional images. Among others, Victor M. Schmidt contributed an essay to the 2001 exhibition catalogue, *Visions of Holiness: Art and Devotion in Renaissance Italy*, entitled “Painting and Individual Devotion in Late Medieval Italy: the Case of Saint Catherine of Alexandria.” In it he explores how medieval religious customs and ideals are reflected in the legend of St. Catherine, a story that provides important information about the manner in which private devotional panels were used and displayed around 1300. Also absent is Beth Williamson’s recent article, “Altarpieces, Liturgy, and Devotion,” that appeared in *Speculum* in 2004, perhaps published just as Wollesen’s book went to press. Williamson provides an excellent overview of the current state of research into the function of images, specifically the altarpiece and the complex relationship between liturgical and

devotional practice. Importantly, she addresses the problematic issues inherent in constructing an artificial dichotomy between public liturgy and private devotion as a means of analysing the altarpiece and the private devotional panel as functional categories. Secondly, some readers might find Wollesen's writing style awkward. His footnotes are packed with interesting ideas and references, but they are occasionally digressive and tend to divert the reader from his main thesis. Finally, in view of the density of Wollesen's study, a general index would have been extremely useful. Although an index is indicated in the Table of Contents, it is absent when one turns to the end of the book. To a lesser degree, the book reveals other editorial and typographical errors.

This book is written by an art historian for other art historians and advanced students of Art History. It may also hold some interest for social historians studying private religious practice and visual culture in late-medieval Italy, and to a lesser degree, Byzantium. The patronage discussed in this book, with the exception of the Museo dell'Opera panel, is private and does not consider the semi-private (or public) form and function of confraternity commissions. On the other hand, some of the private patrons imagined in this study may have been members of confraternities. As such, this study sheds light on the private religious art and practices of individual confraternity members. It would be interesting to further explore the connection between private and semi-private patrons and the relationship between small private images and their semi-private, confraternal counterparts.

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