

Jill Burke, ed. *Rethinking the High Renaissance: The Culture of the Visual Arts in Early Sixteenth-Century Rome*.

Visual Culture in Early Modernity. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012. xvi + 386 pp. \$124.95. ISBN: 978-1-4094-2558-8.

Jill Burke has brought together twelve essays in a stimulating collection that challenges the current aversion to confront style labels. She asks, can we use the term *High Renaissance* anymore? and answers with a cautious but resounding and convincing affirmative: if we redefine it. Divided into two parts, her authors present their work in “Vantage Points” and “Making the High Renaissance: Classicism, Conflation, and Culmination.” These are preceded by Burke’s excellent introductory essay, where she surveys the concept High Renaissance from Winckelmann to Wikipedia, with special attention to the contributions of Heinrich Wölfflin and S. J. Freedberg. She rightly rejects the qualitative distinction that was embedded in the classic definition of the style, and suggests that we use the term neither as a period nor a style moniker, but as describing a methodology shared by such artists as Bramante, Raphael, and Michelangelo, and in parallel with literary studies of the time. This approach is marked by the use of models derived not just from classical antiquity but eclectically combined from multiple sources.

Part 1, “Vantage Points,” problematizes the received picture of the High Renaissance, e.g. the city of Rome under Julius II was anything but a glorious capital, it was torn up and in a shambles (Butters); the Rome described by Cellini was romantically glamorized in his recollection, making it far better than it was, but a suitable setting for his exploits (Trottein).

Opening part 2, Christoph Frommel discusses Bramante’s widely diverse sources, and this is contrasted by Sabine Frommel with Giuliano da Sangallo,

who although the favorite of Lorenzo de' Medici and the most successful imitator of classical antique architecture, failed to assimilate these classical sources to match the creative inventions of Bramante, to whom he lost pride of place in the new century. We are reminded that Vasari observed that the Quattrocento artists lacked freedom (*licenzia*) within the rules (147). Pope Clement VII is shown to have favored early Christian models with his patronage, even as those models were being incorporated into Renaissance objects we identify as High Renaissance in style (Sheryl Reiss). Hemsoll finds Michelangelo drawing on multiple sources among his Renaissance predecessors, as well as antique models, for his Sistine vault. He points to Poliziano's theory of artistic imitation, which Michelangelo would have learned from him, where he advocated relying on a multiplicity of models (284). One is reminded of Raphael's famous letter, actually written by Castiglione, in which he claimed that to shape his ideal beauty he drew features from several beautiful maidens.

Although the usefulness of stylistic terms in teaching is acknowledged, especially by Curran, this is not the principal basis on which they should be retained. There is consensus among the authors that the methodology shared among the artists constitutes a coherency that merits a label. Creating an idealized beauty, the goal traditionally understood as that of High Renaissance artists, is reconfirmed, but what these papers demonstrate is that classical antiquity was by no means the sole source. In fact, early Christian and medieval sources, as well as Egyptian, were all fodder for bold new inventions (Curran). What characterizes the work of High Renaissance artists is a boldness and a sense of control that makes their Quattrocento predecessors look timid by comparison. *Invention* is the operative word, not *imitation* or even *emulation*.

Burke finds this concept of synthesized ideal beauty to be the key to how we should redefine the High Renaissance, not as a style but as a methodology, and not simply as the revival of classical antiquity, but as borrowing from a wide range of earlier models. The discussion necessarily extends to the overwrought term *Mannerism*. Walter Friedlaender's anti-classicism is rejected. Christoff Frommel remarks that in the history of architecture, Mannerism makes sense only if understood as a movement within and not against the Renaissance (148). Burke says, "Reiss's work reminds us that considering the High Renaissance style from the point of view of eclecticism rather than classical rebirth, harmony, or unity, makes the development of 'Mannerist' style a logical continuation of artistic practice rather than an abrupt break" (17).

Burke proposes the term *conflation* to describe this method of combining. Personally I prefer *assimilation*, as employed by Gombrich, because it contains the sense of an integration of disparities. Even though willing to abandon harmony and unity as defining features of the style of the High Renaissance, I would like to retain an appreciation of the magisterial euphony with which these artists do the combining.

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