

Jeffrey Chipps Smith, *The Art of the Goldsmith in Late Fifteenth-Century Germany: The Kimbell Virgin and her Bishop*.

Kimbell Art Museum. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. viii + 86 pp. illus. map. bibl. \$16.95. ISBN: 0-300-11736-1.

This concise, elegantly written, and generously illustrated monograph on a recently acquired, late fifteenth-century silver statuette of a Virgin and Child by an unknown South German goldsmith, is the first of a planned Masterpiece Series produced by the Kimbell Art Museum. As the foreword explains, the purpose of the series is to highlight individual pieces of the collection in way that is both valuable to art historians and accessible to the interested nonspecialist. This inevitably involves the author in something of a balancing act to ensure that both constituencies are well served. Jeffrey Chipps Smith's text amply succeeds in doing this, matching exacting scholarship with a straightforward clarity of exposition that is a model of accessibility. The essay stands comfortably between "collection highlight"-type publications and strictly scholarly monographic studies such as the "Kunststück" series by the Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag. As such, it provides an attractive model of object-based study, appropriate to a museum publication.

Smith's careful scrutiny of the physical characteristics of the "Silver Madonna," a work of extremely fine goldsmith-work, dated 1486, enhanced by high-quality color photographs of details and comparatives, provides a sense of the aesthetic character of the piece and presents the physical clues (small statuettes of local saints and coats of arms on the base) that establish the owner as Bishop Wilhelm von Reichenau (r. 1464–96) and the place of origin within his bishopric of Eichstätt in Franconia. A very general section next locates the Madonna in a broad historical context of European art by interweaving discussion of its iconography, through a discussion of the impact of printing, with an account of its devotional function and style, via consideration of other paintings of the same date by artists as disparate in kind and geography as Mantegna, Hugo van der Goes, and Botticelli. This is followed by an account of the craft of the goldsmith in the late Gothic period, vividly brought to life by aptly chosen paintings and manuscript illuminations, and highlighting the collaborative process by which a silver statue was made that might include a painter's drawn design or a sculptor's wooden model. Detailed photographs of the constituent parts of the statue, disassembled during the conservation process, reveal how the Madonna was constructed and the techniques by which her forms were worked. A series of eerily beautiful x-ray images shows how the hands and perhaps the faces of both Madonna and child were separately cast, the former fixed onto the tube of the arm with inset threading and a securing pin.

Lacking documentary evidence, Smith makes a cautious attribution to an Augsburg workshop on the basis of meager and uncertain stylistic evidence and the demonstrably strong patterns of patronage between Eichstätt and that city, though he prudently hedges his argument with due caveats, given the paucity of surviving examples. Much of the interest of Smith's essay lies in the way he situates the

Madonna within an account of Bishop Wilhelm's impressive program of church patronage, from the founding of new convents to bold building projects within the cathedral. Striking, too, is the evidence he produces of Wilhelm's personal devotion to the Virgin, in particular, a biography, produced shortly after the bishop's death, containing an illumination showing Wilhelm kneeling before an altarpiece that contains a silver Madonna. While this painted statue appears both larger and different in its details to the Kimbell statue, it almost certainly constitutes a rare visual reference to the surviving work and to the bishop's personal veneration of it. An account of the forms of Marian prayers and devotions that would have been performed before it follows from this. An equally informative final section on the history of the statuette, positing its possible displacement from Eichstätt during the Napoleonic Wars and recording its reappearance in the 1885 catalogue of the collection of Meyer Carl von Rothschild and its subsequent history of ownership, concludes a consistently interesting and useful account of an extraordinary and rare survival of the goldsmith's art.

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