The Sovereign Artist: Charles Le Brun and the Image of Louis XIV.
Wolf Burchard.
London: Paul Holberton, 2016. 288 pp. £40.

Charles Le Brun is a singular figure in French history. He was trained in the esteemed tradition of history painting by François Perrier, Simon Vouet, and Nicolas Poussin, and became a leading academician. Yet Le Brun also inherited the legacy of the Renaissance court artist, who was eager to please and willing to create designs for works of any subject or medium, as long as they redounded to the glory of his patron. The tension between these qualities continues to taint some of the scholarship on Le Brun. The artist is maligned for being dictatorial and opportunistic, or overlooked in favor of contemporaries with greater intellectual rigor, such as Poussin. Wolf Burchard effectively constructs the image of a sovereign artist, working in a parallel register to the sovereign himself, who radiates authority but not despotism. For both the king and the artist, this authority sustains itself through a system of hierarchies, real and imagined, theoretical and tangible. Even if the premise offends our political sensibilities, Burchard's book nevertheless succeeds in revealing the mechanisms of Le Brun's authority and its artistic fruits.

This engaging book rehabilitates the artist by presenting him as a "sovereign paterfamilias" (30) to the craftsmen he directed and a consummate "mediator between Louis XIV and the arts" (132). The tapestry of Louis XIV's visit to the Gobelins manufactory includes a visual embodiment of these roles, as Le Brun appears holding up a silver-gilt vase of his own design to the king's view. The tapestry is a meta-materialization of Le Brun's self-conception: it references works designed by Le Brun in a variety of media (including *mise en abyme* tapestries). As Burchard argues, the tapestry and the objects it depicts manifest a principle of unity on multiple levels, through the single authorship or *dessein* of their creator and through the formal techniques of tapestry composition.

The issue of tapestries is an important one, because at this very moment, the French Royal academicians were codifying a boundary separating painting from the mechanical arts. Yet Le Brun's own praxis worked to align tapestry more with painting in its use of the narrative-history genre and its attention to formal devices. Burchard ably draws on the writings of seventeenth-century theorists to show how Le Brun adroitly negotiated seemingly conflicting roles as founding member of the Royal Academy, Premier Peintre du Roi, and director of the Gobelins manufactory, among others. In Le Brun's world, hierarchies of media always yielded to a holistic vision of "all-encompassing" (107) decorated interiors: at Versailles, his authorial presence even extended to the designs for doorknobs. Not surprisingly, this emphasis on artistically integrated spaces elicits comparisons with the Italian Baroque and specific works by Bernini. While not new, analogies between the Ambassadors' Staircase at Versailles and the Scala Regia as theatrical spaces, for instance, are given a fresh and more detailed analysis.

Much of Burchard's book addresses unfinished, never-executed, or no longer extant projects. These include a painted equestrian portrait of Louis XIV, architectural proposals for the east facade of the Louvre, the Savonnerie carpets for the Louvre Grande Galerie, and the Ambassadors' Staircase at Versailles. The two chapters dedicated to architecture and Le Brun's involvement with the Royal Academy reveal his proficiency in both sculpture and architecture. Le Brun received training only as a painter, but his writings and lectures expressed a belief that the three arts should be integrated through the principle of *dessein*, or *disegno*. For this reason, he opposed the 1671 creation of the Royal Academy of Architecture and advocated a merger with the Academy of Painting. Burchard defends Le Brun's architectural ambitions while correctly conceding that his schemes were more pictorial than architectonic in conception. For example, Le Brun's designs for the east facade of the Louvre featured panegyric imagery and sculptural ornamentation reminiscent of ephemeral or festival decor. Burchard's careful discussion of architecture is one of the most original aspects of the book. Although Le Brun shrinks in the shadow of contemporary giants like le Vau, Hardouin-Mansart, and Bernini (in Italy), his engagement with architecture speaks to a paradoxically anti-hierarchical sense of inclusivity. The painter could, without apology, aim his vision high, to the lofty realm of architecture, or low, to the banal universe of tableware.

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Des âmes drapées de pierre: Sculpture en Champagne à la Renaissance.
Marion Boudon-Machuel.
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After having devoted her PhD studies to the sculptor François Duquesnoy (1597–1643), Marion Boudon-Machuel has turned, since a first article published in 2009, toward the study of sixteenth-century sculpture in Champagne. The geographic framework of this study is conceived on the basis of an artistic center of sculpture in Troyes, which would have expanded, from place to place, through the networks of sculptors and mobile workshops of the "beautiful sixteenth century." Its geographic boundaries are therefore quite blurry. With Troyes as the epicenter, it includes the entire diocese (corresponding more or less to the current department of the Aube). It overflows, however, into the eastern margins of the diocese of Sens and into the north of the diocese of Langres. To the north, the southern fringe of the diocese of Châlons is taken into consideration (altarpieces of Bussy-Lettrée and Soudron, Virgin of Mercy of Clesles), as are works of the diocese of Reims and the archiepiscopal city. The chronological framework of Boudon-Machuel's work finds its foundations in the historical and cultural context