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Meredith Martin. *Dairy Queens. The Politics of Pastoral Architecture from Catherine de' Medici to Marie-Antoinette*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011. 336 pp. \$45.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN-10: 0674048997.

Review by Patricia Zalamea, Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá.

Meredith Martin's study of "the politics of pastoral architecture" is centered around a little-known early modern building type, the pleasure dairy—in French, the *laiterie d'agrément* or *laiterie de propreté*—as seen through the patronage of some of the most powerful members of the French Court, from the Renaissance through the eighteenth century. Based on her doctoral dissertation, Martin's book is carefully researched, written in a clear prose and with a well-defined direction. Its main contribution is not only the thorough study and reconstruction of the typology of the pleasure dairy and its transformations, but the analysis of how this building type is woven into the larger context of artistic patronage, within the constraints and demands of courtly life. As such, the book provides the reader with a fascinating account of the power struggles at court, where the pleasure dairy functions as a performative space used to stage the identity of its owners, often with a legitimizing function.

Martin's central thesis is carefully laid out in the introduction and reiterated in each chapter. As an integral part of the extended gardens of the nobility, pleasure dairies were understood as essentially feminine spaces that could be turned into strategic sites of propaganda, intended to showcase fertility, abundance and regeneration, a message of desirable values for both women and men at court. To be seen in the context of architectural patronage, pleasure dairies served to encode "complex messages aimed at the sophisticated, ruling elite within an ostensibly simple, rural veneer" (p. 8). Pleasure dairies were placed at the edge of gardens, as part of a model farm and often in connection to a *menagerie* (pp. 78-80), and were decorated with elaborate rustic motifs—such as grottoes—that emphasized a rural ideal imbedded with pastoral connotations. Shown in contrast to the functional dairy (*laiterie de préparation*), both of which coexisted in these locations, the pleasure dairy was characterized by its sumptuous materials, a point that highlights one of the underlying themes of the book: the ongoing tension between ornament and function as inseparable from politics, economics and social history.

Dairy Queens is divided into five chapters that focus on specific case-studies and that are built around the pleasure dairy as the central thread. Each chapter begins by setting the scene with a historical anecdote, while providing a nice balance between historical account and art historical study. The first chapter draws on the antecedents of the building type and its early development. Inaugurated by Catherine de' Medici around 1560 at Fontainebleau, the pleasure dairy was elaborated and remade according to the specific needs of each patron throughout the following two centuries. While Catherine de' Medici's pleasure dairy takes us back to the Italian Renaissance as a way of modeling her own identity, the later case studies emphasize the tensions that followed the construction, display and use of the pleasure dairy. In the second chapter, the tensions between Louis XIV and the old nobility are seen in the context of the royal menagerie at Versailles, as a space where the king appropriated the typically feminine features of gardens and nature, fusing male and female forms and centering all production around himself, in order to further develop "a myth of royal parthenogenesis" (p. 81).

Chapter three turns to the pleasure dairies within Madame de Pompadour's hermitages as a strategic way "to shape her identity and consolidate her position at court, as well as to entertain the king and strengthen their relationship" (p. 117), while allowing her both to withdraw from court life and "profess a desire for a simpler and more virtuous form of existence, closer to the land like the *ancien* nobility she emulated" (p. 117). The mid-eighteenth century development of the idea that milk and dairies embodied feminine values and were part of a healthy lifestyle constitutes a theme that runs through the final chapters of the book. However, its use in the context of a royal mistress, as was the case of Madame de Pompadour, varies from that of a queen, as explored in chapter four through Marie Antoinette's pleasure dairy at the Hameau and the construction of her royal image through this location. In contrast, chapter five presents the pleasure dairy at Rambouillet as a site built for Marie Antoinette without her knowledge, as a means to model her *persona* through the interventions of dominant male figures. Throughout these chapters, the pleasure dairy reflects the difficulties of women at court, whether queens or mistresses, to find their place and secure it, as well as the ways in which this site could be used as a means to exert a political statement or attempt to model a certain notion of femininity.

Despite the lack of available documentation, Martin is able to build her case in a well-reasoned manner. By relying on primary sources that include plans, descriptions, building records, and a range of diverse texts such as medical and agricultural manuals, as well as architectural treatises, she is able to reconstruct the buildings and the ways in which they functioned. This methodology is justified and the sources are carefully integrated and analyzed. On some occasions, the main ideas are somewhat repetitively stated; at the same time, her theses are easy to grasp. The visual material, especially plans, could sometimes be explained more clearly in the textual descriptions.

In terms of a theoretical framework, Martin explores the notion of femininity as a socially-constructed concept that was strategically enhanced by some of the female protagonists of the book. While the author draws on some theoretical concepts in order to address this issue, this could be made more explicit and considered more deeply. Likewise, a deeper analysis of the pastoral literary genre could enhance the interpretation of the sites. The direct use of such sources could be exploited further: for example, Ronsard's poem comparing Catherine de' Medici to Cybele, which was written for Catherine's children and possibly read out loud during a ceremonial outing to the Mi-Voie, could be analyzed, rather than summarized (p. 31). In general terms, the references to what constitutes the pastoral genre could take a more prominent position within the text, rather than remain in a footnote (p. 269, n. 9).

In addition to setting out the typology of the building and placing it within a social and historical context, the author provides worthy contributions to more general discussions in the history of art. Three major threads run through the book: the ways in which a building type stands at a crossroads that reflects social mobility and shifts; the notion that patronage can elicit contradictory responses based on political struggles; the ongoing tension between ornament and function. As seen through the development of a building type, these themes serve to highlight the complexity behind the diverse social and political functions of artistic patronage during the early modern period. Overall, this book provides a rich source of information and offers a subtle reading of a complex picture that is well worth considering.

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