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Sherry Lindquist, C. M., *Agency, Visuality and Society at the Chartreuse de Champmol*. Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008. xviii + 251 pp. Plates, illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$114.95 U.S. (hb). ISBN 10: 075466046X. ISBN 13: 978-0754660460.

Review by Janet T. Marquardt, Eastern Illinois University.

Sherry Lindquist's study of the art program at the Chartreuse de Champmol is a fine work of analysis and theoretical reformulation of the site's original significance. The book stems from her doctoral dissertation of 1995 (Northwestern University) and key ideas have appeared previously in five articles published from 2002-2006. Now shaped into a comprehensive monograph and organized according to the three operative words in her title—agency, visuality, and society—Lindquist presents a careful reconsideration of the Chartreuse de Champmol as a “site of social discourse” (p. 206) that has been misunderstood, primarily due to the art-historical canonization of Claus Sluter, whose famous *Well of Moses* was the central focus of the “Great Cross” monument in the large cloister. Sluter's innovative figural sculptures have been heralded as the accomplishments of a French Renaissance master, thus removing them from their context within complex late medieval aristocratic and monastic patronage. It is the intersecting demands and restrictions of Philip the Bold and Margaret of Flanders who paid for the artwork, of the silent Carthusian monks who lived with it, of the master artists who made it, and of non-ducals who visited it, that Lindquist explores.

Although coming from a narrower viewpoint about the monument's meaning, Renate Prochno's magisterial publication *Die Kartause von Champmol. Grablage der burgundischen Herzöge (1364-1477)* was under preparation at the same time as Lindquist was researching her dissertation and provided a valuable source study for this monograph.[1] Lindquist was able to see Prochno's meticulous analysis of the relevant art-historical literature and her transcription of archival materials that directly related to the artistic program. But by consulting further primary sources that related to the larger milieu at Champmol and reassessing the context of published translations or excerpts, such as the critical transcription of Guigo's *Consuetudines* by Dom Maurice Laporte and other Carthusian documents coming out of the *Analecta Cartusiana* series edited by James Hogg, Lindquist is able to go beyond Prochno's focus on the ducal ideological agenda and make subtler examinations of both internal and external policies, procedures, and relations among Carthusians, their employees and benefactors.[3] Lindquist's resulting book makes many of the reconstructions that both authors hypothesize accessible to English readers in a more engaging narrative style and with wider consideration of the varied audiences who experienced art at the Chartreuse de Champmol.

The Chartreuse, or charterhouse, of Champmol was a Carthusian monastery situated just outside the city walls of Dijon, in Burgundy. In founding the monastery, the Duke and Duchess of Burgundy, Philip the Bold and Margaret of Flanders, visualized both their local ducal authority as well as Margaret's ties to her powerful family in Flanders through aristocratic iconographic symbols and references to similar objects made, many by the same artists, for Philip's brother Charles V of France. As the Valois uncle wielding the most influence after Charles' death, through his nephew's minority and periods of insanity, Philip even ordered portraits of himself that stressed the family resemblance and might remind viewers of his brother's stable tenure. The ducal couple was able to observe the monks' liturgical celebrations

from a special two-story chapel built on the east end of the church. This space was lavishly appointed and designed to allow Philip and Margaret oblique views that simultaneously hid their own appearance. Suitably elaborate furnishings also filled the main church, with a huge stone altar covered by a brass baldachin topped with angels and hung with curtains. A sculpture of the Trinity by Jean de Marville hung above, and it is presumed a richly painted altarpiece, framed in stone, was also set on the main altar. Twenty-five carved stalls for the lay brothers and seventy-two for the monks were supplemented by massive chairs for celebrants carved by Jean de Liege and fitted into a Gothic tabernacle. A baptismal font, further altars and altarpieces, and an additional chapel dedicated to St. Peter were equally lavishly outfitted. Philip's extravagant tomb was built into the center of the monks' choir. It included a colorful portrait of the recumbent duke on top, clothed in his emblematic finery even though his actual dead body wore the robes of a Carthusian monk. A complex set of striking miniature white clerics and mourners, weaving in and out of gothic arcades, decorated the sides of the tomb. Life-size, kneeling, portrait-like sculptures of the duke and his wife appeared outside, on the entrance portal, accompanied by patron saints and beholding a vision of the Virgin. The position, location, and scale of their two bodies, larger than those of the sacred participants, created a dynamic narrative and unsettled viewer's expectations of standard medieval portal compositions.

To fulfill their goal of solitude and contemplation, the professed monks were housed in individual "cells" around the large cloister. These were, in fact, comfortably furnished two-story houses with gardens, many of which included panel paintings and/or windows with stained-glass narrative scenes. In both cases, this imagery concerned the appearance of Christ at the crucifixion as witnessed by a devout Carthusian. Other buildings, also decorated, included the parlor, gatehouse, and guesthouse as well as the smaller, lay cloister and related service buildings. Since Carthusian monks kept silence, Lindquist theorizes that visual imagery was a potent mode of communication, giving them a sort of "voice" for illustrative preaching. In addition, the corporeality of Christ's suffering body presented a theological dialectic between empathetic prayer and the Carthusian belief that earthly bodies were corrupt. Only the monks were able to negotiate these various meanings through their specialized understandings.

Like many symbols of power that were redundant after the French Revolution, this ducal endowment was effectively stripped of its purpose, sold for material parts, and soon demolished. Similar to its neighbor, the Abbey of Cluny, only a few ruined fragments remain of the grand ensemble, and these have served as points of entry for modern imaginative reconstructions of the whole. Lindquist asks important questions in her introduction that direct the study: Can we ever find a program of meaning or a cohesive aesthetic behind ambitious artistic monuments? How much should we credit unconscious social contexts versus direct intentions of patrons and designers? Who can determine how far cultural adaptations have shifted understandings of medieval art? She is careful to qualify her description of medieval aesthetic objects by the modern term "art" and reminds us that it was the French government's dispersal of unified collections into private and public museums that initiated new identities, categorization, and valuation. At Champmol, the tombs were the most offensive feudal signs and already destroyed in 1793, but individual sculptures were preserved for the municipal museum as representatives of historical achievements.

In the chapter entitled "Agency," Lindquist returns to a topic which she and Stephen Perkinson addressed as guest editors for an issue of *Gesta* in 2002.<sup>[4]</sup> The question is one of artistic identity and the shift from medieval artisan to Renaissance artist, which is bound up in the kind of aristocratic and ecclesiastical patronage found at the Chartreuse de Champmol. Her point in this book is that master artists were working to accommodate both the ducal desires for visible signs of their status on the site of the great donations as well as Carthusian concerns about guarding intensive devotional solitude against rich imagery and lay contact. Rather than seeing someone like Claus Sluter as a maverick, one might read his innovations as ways of negotiating these two apparently divergent demands. Incorporating Valois grandeur in gratitude for Philip's patronage in some artworks while visualizing the monks' ecclesiastical authority and mystical privilege, in particular to see the crucified Christ, in others led

Sluter and other artists to develop compositions with highly naturalistic styles and expressive details that responded directly to patrons' identities. Outlining a complex bureaucratic system for commissions, oversight, and payment, Lindquist demonstrates the intertwined roles of the duke and duchess, the prior and procurator, and the ducal agents with those of the master artists and their apprentices and workers.

The longest chapter in Lindquist's book is entitled "Visuality." It is here that she works out her concept of "intervisuality," suggesting that artworks at the Chartreuse de Champmol were meaningful in relationship to each other. She also clearly establishes that the aesthetic conventions of the late Middle Ages did not allow much room for independent invention but that artists who pushed the envelope were trying to please their patrons with *imagines agentes* or imagery that spurred the imagination and destabilized expectations. Viewers were challenged by varying types of compositions and could identify with diverse figures. Among the examples she studies in this section is Philip the Bold's tomb: "undoubtedly one of the most ideologically potent and theoretically complex monuments of the age" (p. 138). Although Lindquist makes a convincing argument here for the reasons creative imagery was developed to anticipate patrons' needs and to fulfill the desire for ever more delightful ("strange") objects in the gift-giving culture of the courts, as someone who studies earlier medieval art I would remind readers that innovation did not begin in the late Middle Ages. In attempting to contrast the culture at Champmol where "shifting political, economic, and social conditions in the late Middle Ages and early modern period allowed new opportunities for painters, sculptors, and goldsmiths..." with that of earlier centuries, Lindquist implies that art had reached a unique level above mere "revival" into originality. Yet Kurt Ambrose, in his book *The Nave Sculpture of Vézelay: The Art of Monastic Viewing*, for instance, traces the experimentation of the sculptors at Vézelay already around 1100, writing: "The many imaginative compositions throughout the nave suggest a concerted effort by the artists to engage viewers."<sup>[5]</sup> Ilene Forsyth, meanwhile, has extended Meyer Schapiro's study of the Moissac portal sculpture to suggest a complex use of references that spoke to both the feudal nobility, whose donations sponsored the abbey's existence, and the monks' intellectual recognition of profane and sacred allusions.<sup>[6]</sup> These nuanced explorations of visual expressive form are not unlike the situation described by Lindquist at Champmol three hundred years later. Likewise, art that responded to the monks' silent lifestyle was also not new with the Carthusians. Again, Ambrose addresses the application of the gestural language the mute Benedictine monks at Vézelay employed in the iconography of the nave capital scenes.

The final chapter, "Society", addresses how the limited public reception of the Chartreuse de Champmol's visual program expressed intersections between monastic withdrawal and ducal worldliness. Using primary sources, Lindquist reevaluates the number of lay viewers, including women, whose understanding of the Carthusians may have influenced the design of the more public artworks, such as the "Great Cross" in the large cloister.

Although a detailed synthetic study of a large art program, the questions Lindquist asks and the levels of investigation which she pursues make this valuable reading for both scholars and upper-level university students, whether or not they have any need to know so much about the Chartreuse de Champmol. Reaching well beyond sources dedicated to these artworks, she brings in comparable examples from other sites, such as Saint-Denis, employs earlier seminal art-historical work on these topics, such as that of Erwin Panofsky, and frames her arguments from the important theoretical viewpoints of contemporary scholars like Carolyn Bynum, Sarah Beckwith, and Martin Warnke.

By questioning the standard heroizing of Sluter, as well as pushing beyond Prochno's traditional understanding of the Chartreuse de Champmol around its function as the burial site of Burgundian dukes, Lindquist reinstates the dignity and independent role, subsequently lost to history, of Margaret of Flanders. She situates the monks as important clients to which master artists had to answer and considers the way visitors to the abbey might have understood visual messages designed for their consumption. She states most clearly: "The documentary evidence forces us to discard the idea that the

monument expressed the programmatic vision of a dominant personality” (p. 108). It is an inclusive and nuanced approach to art-historical works from which we can all learn much.

## NOTES

[1] Renate Prochno, *Die Kartause von Champol. Grabelege der burgundischen Herzöge, 1367-1477* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002).

[2] Dom Maurice Laporte, *Sources chretiennes* 313 (Paris: Cerf, 1984); James Hogg, Die ältesten Consuetudines der Kartäuser, *Analecta Cartusiana* 1 (1970): 92-103; idem, “The Evolution of Carthusian Statutes from the Consuetudines Guigonis to the Tertia Compilatio,” *Analecta Cartusiana* 99 (1989): 1-3; “Carthusian Annales,” *Analecta Cartusiana* 35/14 (1991): 199-205; James Hogg and Michael Sargent, “The Chartae of the Carthusian General Chapter,” *Analecta Cartusiana* 100, 10 (Salzburg, Austria: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 1988).

[4] Sherry Lindquist and Stephen Perkinson, “Artistic Agency in the Late Middle Ages: Foreward,” *Gesta* 41/1 (2002): 1-2.

[5] Kurt Ambrose, *The Nave Sculpture of Vézelay: The Art of Monastic View* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2006), p. xi.

[6] Ilene Forsyth, “Narrative at Moissac: Schapiro’s Legacy,” *Gesta* XLI/1 (2002): 71-93.

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