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Wallace, William E. Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man, and His Times

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Succinctly stated, “Continuous redesign” entails the possibility for the builders to adapt designs according to changing needs during the long period of construction (incessant revisions); “myopic progression” signifies that the project remains incomplete and the architects (or *capomaestri*) provide detailed portions of the project in stages, delivering only as much as is needed at any particular moment of construction; “concatenation” describes linking and integrating each successive stage of construction to a preceding one; and “retrosynthesis” involves harmonizing previous stages of the project in a coherent whole.

This illuminating book, full of insightful interpretations, extensive new documentation, and rich examples, focuses the reader’s attention on the relationship between architecture and time. Trachtenberg puts emphasis on the understanding of Building-in-Time, and seeks to provide an answer as to why Alberti’s radical idea, which has dominated architecture from the sixteenth century, still appeals to us as a natural way to build, while Building-in-Time has been perceived as something irrational. It is in fact a deeply rational, ordered, and efficient way of building. This book is a good point of departure for rethinking the pre-modern European world of architecture, as well as a starting point to see present architectural culture in a new way. It is dense and challenging reading, intended for scholars and graduate-level students familiar with architecture, history, and philosophy.

The text is accompanied by superb photographs, most of them by the author himself, which perfectly illustrate the points discussed and greatly enhance the flow.

EWA CHWOJKO-SRAWLEY, *Georgina Arts Centre and Gallery*

Wallace, William E.

Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man, and His Times.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp. xvi, 401. ISBN 978-0-521-11199-7 (hardcover) \$30.

William E. Wallace’s biography of Michelangelo is firmly based on the extensive collection of letters by or to Michelangelo and on a rich variety of primary

sources. The result is not only a very “human” insight into the artist’s life, but also a detailed depiction of the larger cultural context.

While providing the reader with an overview of the times and the artist, Wallace focuses on some important aspects of Michelangelo’s life and personality, such as his obsession with his alleged noble origins. He reveals the pivotal role played by the artist’s friendship with important figures such as Tommaso de’ Cavalieri and Vittoria Colonna. Cavalieri was not only Michelangelo’s “be-loved”; he was also, and above all, a powerful source of poetic and artistic inspiration. Colonna, on the other hand, was a pious correspondent and faithful friend who served Michelangelo as a guide in his spiritual/religious growth. Wallace further examines Michelangelo’s crucial role as official artist at the papal court and, last but not least, the abundance of artworks he produced during his long life.

Wallace’s achievement in this biography is to highlight, often through the artist’s own words, the importance and prominence of Michelangelo’s works in his day as well as the sheer volume of work and the variety of difficulties he encountered while trying to complete some of the most iconic artworks of the Italian Renaissance. At the same time, Wallace refers to projects and works other writers tend to overlook or mention only in passing. For example, when discussing the large bronze statue of Pope Julius II in Bologna, Wallace provides the reader with many technical details that allow the reader to better understand what a colossal engineering challenge this project proved to be and the almost endless and intense work it involved.

Wallace thus re-dimensions the myth that has grown up around Michelangelo. The artist is presented not as a “divine” genius, but as a man with both merits and shortcomings, an individual with a sense of humour and a wry wit, a likeable and generous man, often passionate and at times hot-tempered. Wallace’s depiction places Michelangelo at the centre of a vibrant milieu of friends, family, admirers, and patrons that, in turn, colours both his personal and public figure. Some of these individuals are lively figures—such as Pope Paul III Farnese, who appointed Michelangelo chief architect, painter, and sculptor at the Apostolic Palace and, in so doing, gave him the opportunity to create some of his best-known masterpieces.

Wallace’s narrative style is easy to read and very enjoyable, thus reaching out to an audience of scholars and students, specialists and generalists. It brings Michelangelo to life in all his complexity and sets him and his art among

the dynamics of the Italian Renaissance, providing the reader not only with a colourful image of the artist as a man, but also of the vibrant times in which he lived and worked.

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Walton, Michael T.

Genesis and the Chemical Philosophy: True Christian Science in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries.

AMS Studies in the Renaissance 45. New York: AMS Press, 2011. Pp. xiii, 172. ISBN 978-0-404-62345-6 (hardback) \$92.50.

It is a well-known fact that during the Renaissance and early modern period alchemy was not just concerned with the making of elixirs or gold; the art also encompassed a spiritual approach towards nature; and it assumed a distinctly Christian guise. Walton's study examines these developments in such "chemical philosophers" as Paracelsus, Gerhard Dorn, Oswald Croll, Heinrich Khunrath, Robert Fludd, and Jean Baptiste van Helmont. It is a formidably difficult territory for historiographers, as Walton, himself an expert in the field, rightly emphasizes. Although his chosen scholars were in one way or another adherents to the Paracelsian tradition, they developed very heterogeneous and individual ideas. For this reviewer, at least, the treatment of von Helmont's connections between his discovery of "Gas" and the first verses of Genesis belong to the most interesting and well-documented pages of the book (89–97). Walton here convincingly demonstrates the extent to which Bible study closely interlocks with very innovative seventeenth-century laboratory practice.

The reader might wonder, later, why the author does not tie the above section to Van Helmont's remarks on fermentation (123–25); instead, Walton refers us to a previous publication of his own. Unfortunately, it is not the only abrupt transition: *Genesis and the Chemical Philosophy*, from its very start, is not very clearly structured. Both the general reader (at whom the book is aimed) and the specialist would benefit from a longer, general introduction that carefully outlines the content of chapters, and that explains why particular texts