

Kristen Frederickson and Sarah E. Webb, eds, *Singular Women: Writing the Artist*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003, 266 pp., 24 black-and-white illus, \$35.00 Cdn paperback, \$91.00 Cdn hardcover

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other locations across Europe with similar pretensions. Edelstein argues that the French king Charles VIII copied the royal gardens of the Aragonese in Naples as part of his bid to regain control over this territory and assimilate the authoritative cultural status of the Neapolitan court.

Stephen J. Milner brings out the tensions and problems experienced by those involved in the commission for the tomb of Cardinal Niccolò Forteguerri in Pistoia, as family members, church, and commune sought to negotiate their different, competing needs. Milner exposes how the Medici exploited their patronage networks for this commission, attempting to control the cultural patrimony. He traces the results of this contestation and negotiation in his account of one of the most fractious episodes of patron-artist relations to occur during the Renaissance. Deborah L. Krohn, on the other hand, looks at the cultural dynamic between Florence and San Gimignano, outlining a fascinating case study of Florentine artists being employed to decorate the chapel of Santa Fina in the town center of San Gimignano, yet the work they produced remained purely local in flavour. As she reminds us, there are many factors at work in histories of political subjugation and economic decline. She emphasizes the contribution played by locals in negotiating communal identity whilst seeking the support of prominent Florentines, including Lorenzo de' Medici in the period after 1466, bringing out for us the delicate work required by scholars in assessing complex cultural processes.

The last section examines the idea of the “other,” but here it is not religious or geographic difference that is discussed as much as various moments when the self was translated into the “other.” Christopher S. Celenza examines ideas of religious orthodoxy in the case of Marsilio Ficino, who attempted to address the foreignness of an admired but historically remote culture, in particular, the writings of Plotinus and the later Platonists. His scholarship drew him increasingly into dangerous territory with regard to traditional religious and philosophical orthodoxies, as well as moving him out of the direct line of influence with important civic leaders in Florence. Celenza describes the complex terrain of the intellectual life of later-fifteenth-century Florence, indicating that individuals like Ficino had to compete in the sociopolitical field with other intellectuals for a place within debates about the canon of new texts and ideas. He characterizes Ficino as pushing and pulling at the

borders of intellectual and religious orthodoxies, a decision that ultimately cost him a central role within the Florentine social world. In a very real way, the act of translation and transmission affected his social standing within the community.

Returning to a consideration of material culture, Brian A. Curran traces the impact of Egyptian cultural forms on Pope Leo X's vision of the city of Rome. Curran argues for Leo's desire to appropriate the sovereignty of Egyptian god-kings, a thought-provoking if ultimately unprovable possibility. The collection of essays ends with an essay by Morten Steen Hansen on immigration and church patronage in sixteenth-century Ancona, a town that became a center for international trade in the Adriatic. This last essay might fit best with current thinking about the representation of ethnic or marginal otherness in the period. Hansen's essay traces instances of anti-Semitism in this location, while also demonstrating that other ethnic communities, such as the Armenians, translated their identities and aspirations in material ways more easily assimilated in this location, perhaps because of shared elements of Christian culture. Projections of harmony and continuity, particularly the idea of the containment of Armenian Christianity within Roman Catholicism, helped to shape the creation of altarpieces commissioned by Giorgio Morato (George Mourat in Armenian).

Although potentially confusing, the diversity of approaches to the themes of artistic exchange, translation, and reception is one of the strongest features of this volume. The editors have done a good job of tying the essays together in their structuring of the text with introductory essays and prefatory comments in each section. Each one of the essays does attempt to discuss the key themes in the context of specific historical situations and diverse evidence, with some authors being more articulate than others about the interpretative problems. As the editors state, their hope is that the book will constitute a starting point for other re-evaluations of traditional approaches to Renaissance art and culture. I am grateful to the editors and contributors to this volume for shaping our thinking on how we can begin to re-imagine the complexities of cultural transactions in Renaissance / early Modern Italy.

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Kristen Frederickson and Sarah E. Webb, eds, *Singular Women: Writing the Artist*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003, 266 pp., 24 black-and-white illus, \$35.00 Cdn paperback, \$91.00 Cdn hardcover.

In her essay for *Singular Women: Writing the Artist*, Karen Bearor

writes that her publisher wanted her book on Irene Rice Pereira (1902–71) “to address a ‘general audience’ and explicitly requested that any arcane or difficult (read ‘post-structuralist’) jargon be omitted” (p. 192); however, while Bearor also objects to “impenetrable writing,” she worried that scholars and colleagues “might dismiss the book out of hand because it would

lack sufficient textual markers ... despite its active engagement with issues raised by feminist scholars" (p. 193). Bearor's concerns will resonate with feminist academics, along with the overriding focus of Kristen Frederickson's and Sarah Webb's edited collection, which attempts to highlight the large unanswerable question – how to write about individual women artists in a "theoretical climate of post-structuralist scepticism about individuality, originality and hierarchical privileging" (p. 1). In addition, although not directly addressed in the book, questions about strategies for obtaining tenure and promotion weave silently through the words of the authors. Gail Levin alludes to this when she acknowledges that her writing on Edward Hopper rather than her research on Josephine Nivison Hopper (1883–1968) has made her name. Her essay contemplates how a "biography" of Nivison might be written; and she clearly demonstrates the challenges and obstacles one faces when embarking on a project of recuperation.

The book, which grew out of a panel, "The Politics of Rediscovery: The Monograph and Feminist Art History," for the 1997 College Art Association's national conference, raises a number of issues feminist art historians have grappled with for the past two or three decades and that become more pressing in a climate of "post-structuralist scepticism" and post-feminism. As the subtitle suggests, the collection reflects on the "writing of the artist" – it asks how feminist art historians have approached their object of research and study when that object is a female artist. In her introduction, Kristin Frederickson designates feminist art history a "fraught territory," and each contributor describes her interaction or negotiation with this territory.

All the authors address problems they have faced when researching and writing about work produced by women artists and they all recognize the problems inherent in frequently reproducing methods adopted by more traditional scholars. Ironically, feminist scholars, because of the very nature of their terrain, have become part of a post-structuralist approach to the field blithely ignored by many of their highly successful male colleagues. This puts the feminist academic in constant contact with other theoreticians and she frequently risks exposure to criticism from other feminist scholars should her work be considered too "traditional." This may explain why so many outstanding feminist scholars have sought refuge in engaging with the representation of women rather than with the production of women artists; the focus on representation can be subsumed neatly within post-structuralism while still highlighting issues of concern to women. Frederickson and Webb have selected their essays carefully to engage with the concerns of production and representation, and to examine historical artists as well as contemporary artists. Webb, as an artist, a curator, and a theorist, suggests in her epilogue that artists and art historians should write collaboratively, each contributing to "writing the

artist," and while this may be an excellent strategy for writing about contemporary artists, it is not one the historian can easily implement. Indeed, one weakness I find in the book is the tendency for certain historians to over-personalize their relationship with their long-dead objects of study in a way somewhat reminiscent of Eunice Lipton's association with the model in *Alias Olympia: A Woman's Search for Manet's Notorious Model and Her Own Desire* (1992). That aside, it is a "must read" for scholars who write or teach about female artists and, I suggest, for anyone interested in art historical methodology in general.

Appropriately, Mary D. Garrard contributes the lead essay, which situates her ground breaking book on Artemisia Gentileschi within its moment of production while, at the same time, denouncing the 1998 film *Artemisia*. Garrard's interrogation of the film highlights a fundamental problem faced by art historians who write about women: although biography is widely acknowledged as partial, inaccurate, and methodologically questionable within academic circles, it is frequently reproduced, indeed glorified, within popular culture. In the interview that follows after Garrard's denunciation of the film, she acknowledges critiques of her text on Gentileschi, particularly the feminist criticisms of her use of the term "hero." Her explanation is intriguing both in its simplicity and its profundity: "Yet I did intend this oxymoronic title [*The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*]. What does it mean when a woman acts in a way that is valorized for males but not for females?" (p. 33).

Mary D. Sheriff's essay on her research into the self-portraits of eighteenth-century artist Elizabeth Vigée-LeBrun is one of the most compelling in the book because of her determination to reconfigure the writing of the artist, particularly by taking "seriously [Judith] Butler's claim that imitation and citation produce a complex, layered and apparently contradictory subject" (59). Sheriff's reference to Butler, along with her reliance upon feminist theorist Toril Moi and feminist philosopher Michele Le Doeff, gave her a framework with which to question Griselda Pollock's earlier identification of Vigée-LeBrun as a "society lady on the wrong side of the Revolution" (p. 51), and an opportunity to challenge those who deny the efficacy of the monograph. Her commitment to intertextuality also commands attention and provides a model for this approach, which has been used successfully in the past couple of decades by feminist art historians such as Lynda Nead and Lisa Tickner – however neither incorporated the method into an analysis of one female artist.

The inclusion of essays on photography, quiltmaking, and designing is refreshing and complements a desire on the part of feminists to move beyond the traditionally defined fine arts: Carol Mavor writes on photographers – nineteenth-century Clementina Harwarden and late twentieth-century Sally Mann; Gladys-Marie Fry on nineteenth-century African-American

quiltmaker Harriet Powers; and Nancy Gruskin on early twentieth-century architect-designer Eleanor Raymond. Fry undertakes a sophisticated reading of Powers's quilts that, along with Frederickson's earlier comments, provides grist for the deconstruction of Janson's still much used text. In her analysis of the "new" Janson and Janson (2001), Frederickson cleverly and simply juxtaposes writings about women artists with writings about their contemporaries; for example, she compares a section from Janson about Gentileschi with a section about Caravaggio, a section about Camille Claudel with a section on Rodin, and she examines the small section on Vigée-LeBrun. In all instances, the women's appearances or their characters plays a significant role in discussions of their work – something virtually absent from discussions of the work of their male counterparts.

Perhaps most telling for feminist scholars (and most frightening) is Frima Fox Hofrichter's account of her return to research on Judith Leyster. According to Hofrichter, she went "through periods of being more and sometimes less engaged in working on Judith Leyster" (p. 44) and, when she decided in 2001 to "look her up again," she returned to a familiar site for her, the Rijksbureau voor Kunsthistorische Documentatie (RKD) in The Hague. There she proceeded to go through files that contained photographs of Leyster's pictures, on the assumption

they would contain new images from recent sales. The photographs "were repeatedly stamped Tent.Leyster 93–94 (*Tent.* is the Dutch abbreviation for *tentoonstelling*, meaning 'exhibition')" (p. 45). She "suddenly realized that all of these photos had been cut" from her book on Leyster and remembered that her "publisher had generously given the RKD an unbound copy" of her plates "to cut up for their photographic files" (p. 45). However, the inscription attributed the photographs to the organizers of the 1993–94 exhibition catalogue by James Welu and Pieter Beisboer. Hofrichter's reaction is poignant: "All my hard work (which was fundamental to their exhibition) was now attributed to them!" (p. 45). Despite her request to the RKD and its understanding of the request, the RKD pleaded the difficult and time-consuming nature of repairing the mistake – Hofrichter was told it would take years to correct. She ends her essay with a question and comment that many feminist historians might wish to note clearly: "How could I work for years on Leyster and then see all my work, all the photographs from my book, stamped with another name? I told them [the RKD], 'This is how women are written out of history'" (p. 45). One might also add that this is how female art historians are written out of history.

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Glenn Peers, *Sacred Shock. Framing Visual Experience in Byzantium*. Pennsylvania State Press, 2004, 188 pp., 81 black-and-white illus., \$40.00 U.S., ISBN 0-271-02470-4.

In this thought-provoking book Glenn Peers explores the relationship between art and the Byzantine viewer in an often-overlooked aspect of Byzantine art: the frame. Unlike the frame of a painting in an art gallery today that separates what is real from what is not real, in the Byzantine world no such distinction existed. In devotional contexts, Byzantine viewers sought divine presence in their images, and through his examination of framing devices, Peers reveals the role of the frame in gaining devotional access. He offers a series of case studies, incorporating different media, taken from different time periods. The aim is to show the different strategies at work, rather than a chronological development. Although the concentration is on Peers's visual analysis, many of his arguments are supported by evidence gathered from textual sources. The book is amply illustrated, although unfortunately some of the black-and-white images are so small that it can be difficult to see details essential to understanding the text.

In chapter one Peers discusses how the framing of Crucifixion iconography in the sixth and seventh centuries could facilitate assimilation. Of particular concern is the relationship between the bodies of the worshipper and the divine, and how the gap between the temporal and divine can be merged as one. For example, his examination of pectoral crosses is an interesting exploration into the relationship between Crucifixion iconography, the shape of the cross, and the Christian body. Worn around the neck, with the cross resting on the chest, these Crucifixion images were framed by the cross, and then both image and cross were framed by the wearer's body that, in turn, would make the sign of the cross during prayer.

Chapter two focuses on a page from the ninth-century Chludov Psalter (Moscow, Historical Museum, cod. 129, fol. 23v) and shows how iconographic details, such as blood on the page, can serve as entries for devotion. The lower part of the page depicts the iconoclastic council of 815, with three of the iconoclasts whitewashing an image of Christ. The figures are framed by blood. It flows down the right side of the page, pools at their feet, and is met by a smaller stream of blood that flows between the two seated figures on the left. The bloody frame is a