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C. Jean Campbell, *The Game of Courting and the Art of the Commune of San Gimignano, 1290–1320*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997, 352 pp., 51 half tones, 6 line illus., ISBN 0-691-01210-5

Louise Bourdua

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been accepted. Harrod uses Flockinger's personal acceptance of modernism as a starting point in describing her integration of fine art into jewellery. Emphasizing Flockinger's use of non-precious and unconventional materials (copper, wooden beads and seedpods), Harrod states that Flockinger "emerged as a striking modernist" (135). The influence of Flockinger's work was widespread, with sales through Mary Quant's shop, exhibitions at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and teaching at the Hornsey School of Art. Harrod credits Flockinger with creating what she describes as "decorative modernism," a successful alternative modernist strain fuelled by the "rediscovery" of the Arts and Crafts movement and Art Nouveau in the 1960s and "hedonistic consumerism." Harrod's concluding chapter works nicely as an examination of modernism, whose influence runs as an undercurrent throughout the majority of the chapters.

The diversity of writing styles and critical approaches contained within *Pioneers of Modern Crafts* makes it difficult to generalize about the book as a whole. While some authors tackle important social issues such as class, the majority of articles operate as historical pieces with a focus on technique and style. The creation of monographs which neglect the social aspects of emergent craft history simply perpetuates the stylistic descriptions that the new art history is struggling against. The lack of issue-based examinations is frustrating, as many of the artists chosen afford excellent opportunities to discuss problematics such as team work versus individual production, the role of gender in the selection of materials and markets, and the difficulties of cultural integration into British society. The monographic essay can be a vehicle for the discussion of theoretical issues, but unfortunately *Pioneers of Modern Craft* falls short of this ideal, with some articles offering only a superficial peek into the lives of specific craftspeople.

In reading this book, there exists a disturbing feeling that *Pioneers of Modern Craft* was not written with the intention of reaching as large an audience as possible. In *The Culture of Craft*, also published by the Manchester University Press in 1997, Peter Dormer writes in his introduction that he regards "all the chapters in this book as a contribution to a family argument provided either by members or friends of the family." [6] With contemporary craft history struggling to break free of its marginalized status within the world of art, perhaps it is no surprise that *Pioneers of Modern Craft* exists as a slim, black-and-white illustrated volume. Perhaps *Pioneers of Modern Craft* is operating as another contribution to the notion of the crafts that celebrates its marginal role. The specialization of subjects, adoption of canonical boundaries from traditional art history, and scarcity of issue-based articles may indicate a willingness inside the craft community to continue with publications modelled on traditional historical models. While *Pioneers of Modern Craft* offers an advance for craft history by establishing a base of artists from which to continue research and discussion, the question craft historians should be asking themselves (in this age of interdisciplinary boundary crossings) is whether the establishment of nationally biased icons of craft in the form of a collection of biographies is essential in itself to a history of craft?

Sandra Alfoldy
Concordia University, Montreal

Notes

1 In the cases of Leach, Rie and Voulkos, their material, clay, is essential in allowing them to enter into history as artists rather than craftspeople. Britain's Herbert Read, art critic and former curator of Ceramics at the Victoria and Albert Museum 1922–1931, espoused the view that pottery was plastic art in the most abstract form, lending some credibility to the material of clay within the British art world.

2 It is of interest that Coatts classifies glass as a team activity while in North America the glass artist Dale Chihuly has successfully negotiated his place within the monograph tradition as an independent artist.

3 It should be noted that Oliver Watson is the Chief Curator of Ceramics and Glass at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

4 Edmund de Waal, "Homo Orientalis: Bernard Leach and the Japanese Soul" in Tanya Harrod, ed., *Obscure objects of desire: Reviewing the crafts in the twentieth century* (London, 1997), 117–25.

5 When Murray was appointed head of the pottery department at the Royal College of Art in 1926, he had been in competition for the post with Bernard Leach.

6 Peter Dormer, ed., *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future* (Manchester, 1997), 16.

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The image of the commune of San Gimignano retained by the modern-day traveller is that of a romantically perched hilltown, complete with towers and gates. What seems at first glance medieval, such as "picturesque crenellations," is all too often the result of rather disastrous restoration. Even the Communal Palace was not spared a later facelift. Yet, there are times in which restorations are most revealing, as when a rare secular fresco cycle is reconstituted. This is the case in the chamber of the bell tower (the *Torre del Popolo*) of the communal palace, the subject of this study.

The fragmentary narratives here, including the seduction

and later beating of a "Prodigal Son," the seduction of Aristotle and his humiliation when caught being ridden (and whipped) by a woman, a flirtatious street encounter between two strangers (man and woman) which culminates in a sensual bathing scene and ends between the sheets, have more often captured the attention of social and cultural historians (who have drawn heavily from it for their histories of private life or studies of prostitution) than art historians. Indeed, the unusual sexual imagery's fate was sealed in the 1930s when it was dismissed as "impossibly enigmatic," simple "black-and-white moral allegories." Thus, any study which returns to them is to be generally welcomed. The author's aim is to contextualize the decoration anew, though not within the usual framework of political theory but as "politically engaged poetic discourse." The methodological tools employed are therefore wide-ranging, from archival research to the juxtaposition of images, historical and political events with contemporary and later literary forms.

All contextualization needs framing, and this forms the greater part of the book. First, a discussion of the history of the communal palace, which includes a revision of the scant and contradictory documentary evidence, establishes the dating and function of those rooms which preserve their decoration. These include the great hall on the second floor which was presumably used as a council hall and the chamber on the third floor of the bell-tower which the author concludes can be none other than the podestà's private apartment. There follows a discussion of "cultural patronage" by the commune which features the early fourteenth-century poet, Folgore di San Gimignano. This poet's works are frequently cited throughout the text, as are the works of Boccaccio and others, to argue that they evoke the "same spirit" as the paintings in the communal palace.

The second chapter focuses on the council chamber's various layers of decoration, from the anonymous paintings of 1290–91 depicting jousting and hunting vignettes, struggles between animals and coats-of-arms of local families, to the more elusive image of courtiers approaching an enthroned figure. Each scene is elaborately paralleled to contemporary literature quoted at length, and in every case, a Guelph political message emerges. In the author's words, the decoration "may best be understood as a mythologizing of San Gimignano's foundation as a Guelph state and a glorification of the commune's role in the Angevin/Guelph conquest of Tuscany". This is not an altogether new line of investigation. It is generally accepted that the cycle is likely to allude to the commune's homage to Charles I of Anjou in 1289. The author considers other possibilities such as an homage to Charles II painted in commemoration of a military victory, but in the end, settles for a festive court honouring the first. The game of courting is introduced in the middle of this political discussion, as a ritual of games by women played in May and June, and is used to explain such details as garlands, hunts, etc. As for the later Maestà painted by Lippo Memmi in 1317, which includes the figure of the podestà Nello dei Tolomei, this too featured the "implied presence of the commune."

Although we are told at the beginning of chapter three that, "ultimately ... the tower room decorations, like those of the council hall, were part of an evolving image of communal sovereignty," it is the erotic potential of the decoration that dominates this last section. One by one, each narrative is carefully presented as "versions of age-old storylines," through juxtapositions with courtly romance, French ivories and Bolognese illumination, as is the unusual sequence of reading from right to left. Indeed, the author makes such a strong case for reading the decoration as entertaining love stories, that this reader finds it hard to detect there the "very lively and multidimensional reflection of a desire for autonomy on the part of the commune".

Fragmentary decoration which is, by the author's admission, "barely possible adequately to describe ... much less understand what it might have meant to its fourteenth-century audience" always poses particular challenges. And this reading is not without problems. At times Campbell offers meanings that are plainly impossible to document, such as the assertion that the podestà knew (through a knowledge of hidden bird symbolism) that when he left his bed chamber, he would be "passing from the private and metaphorically female domain of the chamber, where surrender to the pleasures of amorous discourse ... was conceded, to the public and male domain of the council hall, where the seductive potential of such discourse posed an everpresent threat to his ability to render just judgment." That we have, of course, no way of knowing what decoration was immediately next to the Tower Chamber does not seem to concern the author. Filling the past with distant cities' literary works, statutes and customs may complement the picture, but the evidence of other places and other times is no substitute for the local and contemporary.

The reader could have been helped along with more diagrams and better quality photographs. At times, details which are deemed to be crucial to our understanding are simply not visible in the reproductions. Moreover, the other drawback identified by the author, that "there is no readily available definition of how the private realm of a public official may have been conceived" remains. The author aimed to breath new life into the frescoes of the Communal Palace; the reader will emerge better informed about San Gimignano's statutes, the podestà's lifestyle and the literature of the time. The mysterious images, however, will still hold their secrets.

Louise Bourdua
University of Aberdeen, Scotland