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The Revival of the Olympian Gods in Renaissance Art by Luba Freedman

Review by: Patricia L. Reilly

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that palaces were little more than assemblages of quotations from and about antiquity. There is a brief conclusion followed by a useful checklist of manuscripts and printed copies of Vitruvius down to 1500.

Cambridge University Press deserves praise for the quality of the book's production and the clarity and resolution of its illustrations. Yet there are idiosyncrasies. The dust jacket displays an image of the Medici villa at Poggio a Caiano, an important *all'antica* structure that merits only a passing reference in the text. As Clarke makes it clear, "the ancient house . . . was not always defined as an urban or rural structure" (136). The typological, theoretical, and ideological interrelationships between palaces and villas remains an open question, and clues toward its resolution can be found in James S. Ackerman's *The Villa* (Princeton, 1990). In addition, the architectural plans specifically drawn for this book will be useful to students and scholars, but they are not discussed in any depth.

Central to the book's subject is a mediation between a new antiquarianism based on philology and literary criticism, and an older antiquarianism rooted in archaeology. For the most part, Clarke navigates the course between these topics with knowledge and elegance. But the greatest strength of this work may be Clarke's observations on the blurring of distinctions between architecture of antiquity and that of *both* the Gothic era and the Quattrocento. Visibly Gothic structures could be compared with those of the classical age not because of any incidence of *all'antica* detail but because of the presence of more essential measures of classicism — the layout of the palace, its employment of symmetry, and the magnificence of its decorations. The early moderns looked at the ancient house according to criteria truly different than our own.

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Luba Freedman. *The Revival of the Olympian Gods in Renaissance Art*.

Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xv + 301 pp. index. illus. bibl. \$85. ISBN: 0-521-81576-2.

This useful book examines the context in which Italian Renaissance artists first began to represent the twelve Olympian deities as autonomous lifelike figures in the classical style. As Freedman demonstrates, this particular phenomenon — which to many of us may seem to be just another manifestation of the larger revival of classical culture in the Renaissance — was in fact quite significant. In the Middle Ages images of autonomous lifelike figures and of Olympian deities were both produced, but they were represented as separate entities. Medieval representations of an autonomous figure — defined here as one that is presented alone or, if in a group, as a central, independent authority — had been reserved almost exclusively for Christian saints and rulers. In the Cinquecento (the period of focus in this book) artists created autonomous, lifelike representations of Olympian deities for the first time since antiquity. These "Olympian" deities, Freedman

shows, were represented in the Renaissance in their Roman incarnations — as Jupiter, Juno, Neptune, Apollo, Diana, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Minerva, Ceres, Bacchus, and Vulcan.

This revival of images of autonomous Olympian figures served the artists who created them and the patrons who commissioned them well. For artists such as Michelangelo, Baccio Bandinelli, and Benvenuto Cellini, these works served as demonstration pieces of their skills when they were first attempting to establish a name for themselves. Once established, these artists continued to create such works to display their specialized knowledge as well as their talent and ingenuity in rendering their creations in a mode that closely approximated that of their ancient predecessors.

For patrons, these images served to augment their power precisely during the period when Italy was under the political and military hegemony of Emperor Charles V. Further, as Freedman argues, the types of patrons for these Cinquecento images of deities were the same as those who commissioned such works in antiquity: the ruling elite and their circles. In the sixteenth century, these rulers were men like Cosimo de' Medici who commissioned Bartolomeo Ammannati to create a *Neptune* fountain to enhance his image and to dominate the Piazza della Signoria. Unlike their predecessors, however, these patrons were always secular and the images they commissioned were always meant for secular spaces. Although ecclesiastics collected antique statues (as symbols of a vanquished pagan culture), they seldom purchased or commissioned the contemporary images of Olympian deities under consideration here. This stemmed from a concern that the size, media, and classical treatment of these figures would invoke the cult images upon which they were based and the pagan worship that they facilitated.

Freedman argues that in order to address this fact, artists attempted to mitigate the pagan connotations of their figures by secularizing them, by transforming them from gods into allegories of power and virtue. To do so they turned away from the visual traditions found in ancient coins, gems, and cult statues and turned instead to ancient literary representations of these deities. Informed by Pliny's *Natural History* and Pausanias's *Guide to Greece*, Renaissance artists chose to represent the Olympian deities as actors in Greek and Roman mythical dramas and comedies, not as iconic incarnations of the all-powerful pagan gods that ancient sculptures in particular had represented them to be. In these images, she claims, Renaissance artists broke with the "static calm" their predecessors employed to depict these deities and introduced to their depictions pronounced facial expressions, poses, and gestures. One of the many examples she provides of this is Giambologna's *Neptune*, which, like most sculptures of Olympian deities in the sixteenth century, was commissioned to decorate a fountain in a public square. In this sculpture the artist broke with the ancient visual precedents for portraying the god's divine pose and posture and portrayed Neptune instead with stooped, sloping shoulders. In doing so, Freedman argues, Giambologna emphasized Neptune's similarities to a mortal ruler rather than emphasize his divine qualities. Other examples she analyzes in this light include Cellini's statuette of Jupiter, who

appears with his forehead furrowed in thought; Raphael's *Parnassas Apollo*, who gazes raptly toward the heavens; and Michelangelo's *Bacchus*, whose indecorously open-mouthed smile reveals his inebriated state. Implicit in Freedman's analysis is that Cinquecento artists sought to deviate from the ancient static and expressionless images of these deities by employing a Hellenistic vocabulary rather than one that could be considered High Classical. The implication that artists made this stylistic choice in order to humanize their images of Olympian deities and thus to neutralize any pagan connotations they might have is an intriguing one that might have been explored.

Ultimately, Freedman argues that there were two ways in which these images of the Olympians were received. The first was by humanists who viewed them as contemporary versions of artistic masterpieces made by the eminent artists of antiquity. In other words, humanists who viewed these works as important for their artistic, not pagan, meaning. The second was by ecclesiastics who viewed them as images of false deities. It was this second view, she concludes, that prevailed by the end of the Renaissance. As a result, the end of the Cinquecento also marked the end of the production of images of autonomous lifelike Olympians.

Intent upon taking nothing for granted when considering a topic that may seem all too well understood, Freedman considers every aspect of it carefully. If at times the frequent repetitions and signpostings that result from this effort seem somewhat heavy handed, they are worth it. By considering the ways in which the combination of these elements: autonomous, lifelike, classical, and Olympian, were brought together to create images of deities in the Renaissance, Freedman contributes to our understanding of the significance of these images for artists and patrons alike.

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Paul Barolsky. *Michelangelo and the Finger of God*.

Issues in the History of Art. Athens, GA: Georgia Museum of Art, 2003. xviii + 84 pp. illus. bibl. \$12. ISBN: 0-915977-49-4.

Michelangelo scholarship remains a growth industry, yet the production of research of creative force, now as in the past, is a rare occurrence. *The Finger of God* is such an occurrence. Much is crowded into Paul Barolsky's short book. The economy of what began as a series of lectures only augments the impact of this skillful distillation of sweeping topics. Barolsky's historical reflection is, in other words, just the sort of work one has come to expect of this ever-original art historian.

Barolsky explores with confidence several matters relating to Michelangelo's life, art, and writings, and to Vasari's biography of the sculptor as well. This is not the first time Barolsky has roamed in such territory. The relationship between