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Freedman, Luba. Classical Myths in Italian Renaissance Painting

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Freedman, Luba.

Classical Myths in Italian Renaissance Painting.

New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xvi, 292 + 14 colour plates, 32 figures. ISBN 978-1-107-00119-0 (hardcover) \$95.

Luba Freedman's book offers us a fascinating trajectory into paintings of the Renaissance with classical mythological subjects, surveying some of the most impressive episodes in the painted media ever produced on Italian soil. The study and depiction of ancient myths are viewed here as part of Renaissance culture and as the product of a historical period characterized by princely courts and elite circles of humanists, literati, and artists working in productive tensions. Divided into seven chapters, the book sets out to chronologically chart the rise of mythological narratives in mural paintings in the late quattrocento, and then consider their development in the early sixteenth century in easel paintings with *all'antica* renderings. In this sense, Freedman's book is indebted to Erwin Panofsky's notion of such art as a gradual re-appropriation of mythological subjects in *all'antica* style, a programmatic configuration of the past in the present that was achieved fully in the art of painting in early cinquecento Italy.

Within this critical framework, chapter 2 is notably effective—dedicated to suburban villas and examining in detail the Villa Farnesina in Rome. Commissioned by the Sienese banker Agostino Chigi in the Trastevere district, a zone that had been the site of ancient Roman suburban residences, the villa was designed by the famous architect and painter Baldassare Peruzzi, who decorated some of the rooms with classical subjects. Among the other artists hired by Chigi to embellish the loggia of his villa, Raphael and Sebastiano del Piombo stand out. Produced in rivalry and on adjacent walls, their murals represent the famous tale of the unreciprocated love of Polyphemus for the Nereid Galatea, whose astonishing beauty inspired the monster to become a poet, as narrated by Theocritus (*Idyll*, 11.10–18), Phyllostratus (*Imagines*, 2.18), and Politian (*Stanze*, I.116–17). In her subsequent analysis of the frescoes in chapter 4, Freedman argues that Sebastiano's *Polyphemus* and Raphael's *Galatea* replicate these figures as “they were imagined from antiquity” (p. 80). Both artists strove to recreate their original versions of this classical and textual story of love and unfulfilled desire.

Another intriguing discussion is found in chapter 5, which focuses on mythological narratives rendered in the early sixteenth century in the style of the ancients. It begins with a discussion of the contemporaneous excavations that brought to light ancient statues (the celebrated Torso del Belvedere and Laocoön, for example), works which were displayed in courtyards and gardens and served as sources of inspiration for the development of an *all'antica* style in the Renaissance. Freedman also reminds us of the importance of the study of ancient reliefs such as the continuous frieze on Trajan's Column in Rome illustrating this emperor's war against the Dacians, and which provided invaluable visual information on ancient military costume, weapons, and clothing and on how to recreate scenes in a credible ancient style. According to Freedman, the inclusion of antique objects recreated from archeological evidence in depictions of classical myths further intrigued Renaissance viewers. In this respect, Correggio's depiction of the nymph Io is of particular significance since it includes a large water jar resembling those used in antiquity. Correggio's appealing rendering of the Ovidian story of Jupiter, who metamorphosed into a cloud in order to sexually unite with Io, is part of a series of four pictures, the so-called *Loves of Jupiter*, which according to Giorgio Vasari were painted for the Duke of Mantua, Federico Gonzaga, as ducal gifts to Emperor Charles V in the 1530s. Although Correggio painted them as a set of four thematically-linked images, they could also stand independently or else in pairs: in fact two of the works, *Io* and *Rape of Ganymede*, have a vertical format, while the other two, *Danae* and *Leda*, are composed with a horizontal format. Meant for the enjoyment of a restricted, cultivated audience, Correggio's Ovidian images constitute one of the pinnacles of Renaissance art, with their mythological subjects translated into an *all'antica* style that is simultaneously sensual and emotional, a suggestive example of what Freedman defines as a "novel approach to painting in the Cinquecento" (p. 188).

Appropriately, chapter 7 provides us with a discussion of the notion of *poesia*, that, beyond its obvious literary meaning, can also be intended to refer to a painting of a mythological subject meant to be experienced and enjoyed for the aesthetic pleasure it conveys to cultivated beholders. In this context, *poesie* specifically indicated a genre of images whose subjects were drawn from poetry and whose makers recreated ancient narratives in highly personalized forms, as the poets themselves had done. As Freedman put it, Vasari used the term *poesia* to indicate "a configuration of mythological personages and

landscapes, one that may or may not include scenes from specific myths,” turning images into poems of seductive mental and visual appeal. Such a corpus constitutes the long-standing legacy of Italian art linking the classical past with the Renaissance present through impressive *all’antica* forms that even in our modern image-saturated world have the power to lure, fascinate, and intrigue viewers, as is demonstrated in Freedman’s volume.

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Gregory, Sharon and Sally Anne Hickson (eds.).

Inganno — *The Art of Deception: Imitation, Reception, and Deceit in Early Modern Art.*

Visual Culture in Early Modernity. Farnham, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012. Pp. xi, 204 + 21 ill. ISBN 978-1-4094-3149-7 (hardcover) \$104.95.

The true *inganno* (deception) of the copy is that it is never faithful to the original. This reality—the processes and implications of which form the crux of this volume—is what makes the copy a stimulating, consequential, and increasingly studied subject. Sharon Gregory and Sally Anne Hickson bring together ten essays (not all are discussed here) on European art and theory, from the fifteenth through the eighteenth century, that demonstrate how replication frequently reveals more of makers than their models and that consider how the new physical and temporal contexts—inhabited by the copy, and foreign to the original—significantly influence the latter’s reception. If the Renaissance placed unprecedented importance on the “original,” these essays make clear that this very impulse also drove the production of various copies, stimulated the rise of professional classes of art expert, and inspired countless deceptions: unintentional, deliberate, virtuous, scurrilous, material, technical, professional, and authorial. Although many categories of repetition are examined, the volume’s exclusive focus on imitation of another artist’s work or style neglects an essential type: self-copying. Individual contributions also vary in quality and significance. Yet the collective picture that emerges of an economy of copying—so intertwined with concepts of authenticity, originality, imitation, deception and replication that it defies strict classification—is essential.