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Jessica Maratsos

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Woollett, Anne T., Yvonne Szafran, and Alan Phenix.

Drama and Devotion: Heemskerck's Ecce Homo Altarpiece from Warsaw.

Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum / Getty Publications, 2012. Pp. 92 + ill. ISBN 978-1-60606-112-1 (paperback) \$25.

This slim volume documents the international collaborative efforts between conservators and curators undertaken as a part of the Conservation Partnership program at the J. Paul Getty Museum. Issued in conjunction with an exhibition that followed the cleaning and restoration of Maerten van Heemskerck's *Ecce Homo* altarpiece, the catalogue is divided into two complementary essays: "A Renaissance Altarpiece Revealed," by curator Anne T. Woollett, and "The *Ecce Homo* Triptych: Heemskerck's Materials and Methods," by the conservators Yvonne Szafran and Alan Phenix.

Due to the destruction of many of Heemskerck's altarpieces during the 1566 Revolt of the Netherlands, the *Ecce Homo* from the National Museum in Warsaw represents a rare example of the genre by this prominent Dutch painter, thus making its restoration an important contribution to the field. In particular this investigation and analysis enriches our understanding of Heemskerck as a critical innovator who united Italian pictorial principles with traditional northern techniques. Further, the technical findings published here may provide the groundwork for future explorations of Heemskerck's workshop practice, about which, Woollett points out, very little is known at present.

Woollett's essay provides an engaging overview of Heemskerck's career that establishes the important artistic precedents to the *Ecce Homo* altarpiece. Two years after studying with Jan van Scorel, one of the first northern artists to popularize the Italian manner in the Netherlands, Heemskerck too departed for Rome in 1532. When in the eternal city, he executed a vast range of studies from sculptural and architectural fragments of antiquity, as well as drawings of the newest innovations in figural style embodied in the work of Michelangelo, Francesco Salviati, and Giorgio Vasari. Woollett illustrates the ways in which this extensive experience abroad prepared Heemskerck to capture the complex desires of his patrons to masterful effect in the *Ecce Homo* altarpiece. The painter's use of dramatic bodily expression combined with the heightened colour palette typical of the paintings he saw in the south served to emphasize Christ's suffering as depicted in the central panel. This devotional poignancy is balanced by the "learned, elite idioms influenced by ancient and modern Rome

that were associated at the time with Emperor Charles V and Hapsburg authority in the Netherlands” (12). Antique inspired motifs appear in the side panels, where they are combined with the descriptive naturalism that characterized traditional Netherlandish painting. To complement her well-crafted historical analysis, Woollett also addresses the technical and structural aspects of the altarpiece. She is attentive to passages that have been brought into greater visual relief through the cleaning of the work, and discusses the important relationship between the frame and the panels. Based on the sophisticated *all’antica* design of the frame, she posits that this aspect of the work too was designed by Heemskerck, though likely executed by a local woodworking firm in Dordrecht.

Heemskerck’s innovative fusion of styles forms a critical link between the historical and technical essays. As Szafran and Phenix note in their introduction, “By 1544, the year the *Ecce Homo* triptych was painted, Heemskerck had successfully formulated a working method that was firmly based on traditional Northern techniques but also incorporated certain materials and methods adopted from Italy that facilitated his prolific creativity” (29). The complex scientific analysis, which is rendered in clear language accessible to the non-specialist, is broken down into short sections that address the construction of the frame, the preparation of the panel, the use of underdrawings, and the composition of the pigments. Particularly welcome are the high quality images that accompany the technical essay. There are full page reproductions of the x-radiographs, ultraviolet photographs, and infrared reflectograms, as well as numerous detailed close-ups that are deployed to illustrate the different stages of the painting process. Heemskerck’s rapid application of paint not only differed greatly from his northern contemporaries, but further testified to the facility and ease with which he worked. In highlighting the parallels between Heemskerck’s dramatic, lively figures and his practical approach—in which “finishing details are often particularly spontaneous and free” and the brushstrokes are “painted in a very bold and almost expressionistic manner” (64)—Szafran and Phenix underscore the fundamental relationship between pictorial style and technique.

Together, the essays and images in *Drama and Devotion: Heemskerck’s Ecce Homo Altarpiece from Warsaw*, while necessarily restricted in focus, make a significant contribution to the growing scholarship on this important

northern master. Moreover, this succinct catalogue models the kind of exciting insights that can result from the collaboration between conservators and historians.

JESSICA MARATSOS
Columbia University