

BOOK REVIEW

Koopstra, Anna. *Jean Bellegambe (c. 1470–1535/36) Making, Meaning and Patronage of his Works*

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While monographs focused on so-called minor or forgotten artists have somewhat fallen out of style in academic publishing, there is still tremendous value in such publications for specialists. A case in point is Anna Koopstra's *Jean Bellegambe*, which does not assemble a complete corpus in the manner of a traditional catalogue raisonnée; instead, Koopstra offers an overview of key issues in a singular artist's oeuvre, examining his patrons, key commissions, and works in terms of their historical context (with important archival documentation) and physical construction (with technical analysis of altarpieces, diptychs and panels' construction, underdrawing, and investigation of the artist's application of paint). While seemingly narrow in focus—solely on the painter from Douai and even more closely on a handful of works—this approach yields fascinating insights into the working methods of a Netherlandish artist outside of the more familiar urban centers of Antwerp and Bruges.

Emerging from the author's doctoral work, *Jean Bellegambe* contains eight chapters, an introduction, and a conclusion. The first three chapters address, respectively, the artist's biography, what is known about his overall oeuvre and relationships with patrons, his working techniques and use of materials. Following these chapters, there are five object-specific case studies that investigate the structure, context, and function of individual artworks: *The Cellier Altarpiece* (the Metropolitan Museum of Art), *The Diptych of the Virgin and Child with St Bernard and an unidentified Cistercian Monk* (Frick Art and Historical Center Pittsburgh), the *Triptych of the Annunciation* (State Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg), the *Triptych of the Last Judgment* (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin), and *The Potier Triptych* (Musée de la Chartreuse, Douai). Her approach is distinguished by its consideration of a wide variety of works in diverse locations, her close attention to archival sources, and her technical as well as contextual study of artworks.

Bellegambe's oeuvre is remarkably consistent; while it is relatively straightforward to assign works to his hand, there is very little to distinguish between early and later works. Koopstra wisely sticks to the 1976 attributions of Robert Genaille. But what sets Bellegambe's work apart are its often novel iconographic combinations and compositional solutions. As a case study of an artist working outside of dominant artistic centers, this study of Bellegambe centers on the study of form and function, reconstructing the particular negotiations between painter and patron through a select number of works.

Bellegambe lived and worked in Douai, where there was not a painters' guild but there were powerful local patrons, and this locale accounts for some of the unusual features of his paintings. The remarkable survival of two large triptychs with their original polychromed frames, rich in vegetal ornament crawling with putti (*Triptych of the Adoration of the Magi* and *Triptych of the Preparations for the Crucifixion*, both Musée des Beaux-Arts, Arras), allows Koopstra to place Bellegambe's work alongside contemporaries like Dirk Vellert, Jan Gossaert, and the Antwerp Mannerists. More could be done here to draw out Bellegambe's interest in the forms of antiquity. In a later chapter, Koopstra raises the possibility of Bellegambe working after an exemplar by Bernard van Orley (95–96), which suggests how aristocratic taste moved across social classes. Douai's unique status as a city of merchant artisans who comprised the ruling class or *échevinage* suggests the ways in which all'antica style was embraced not only by the aristocracy but this newly powerful urban middle-class. Yet Koopstra traces how Jean

Bellegambe was also paid for designs for metalwork, for painting the doorframes and portals of a tabernacle, and possibly repainting the image of *Our Lady of Grace* in Cambrai cathedral (23), truly exemplifying the varied work of early sixteenth-century painters' workshops.

The case study chapters are well-crafted interpretations of singular works, incorporating close analysis of each paintings' facture, relevant archival material, and contextual analysis. This is particularly rewarding in the chapter on *The Last Judgment Triptych*, which incorporates the addition of the seven deadly sins into the iconography, likely using textual sources and printed examples as source material. The singular "Boschian" figure in the background of the central panel, Koopstra suggests, indicates a shared point of reference between the two artistic contemporaries. This intriguing possibility is not further explored by the author, and while the counterargument that Bellegambe knew Bosch's work is also far-fetched, this reader would have appreciated more here. Ultimately, her argument, contra Craig Harbison, is that this picture is characterized by its modernity (122) in its citation and manipulation of existing models; this is largely convincing. In the end, Koopstra presents Bellegambe as an inventive and engaging figure, far from the provincial; his engagement with the very latest stylistic developments in the Low Countries and his numerous iconographic innovations demonstrate how Netherlandish artists working in smaller markets met the demands of an increasingly sophisticated consumer market of civic, ecclesiastic, and private patrons.