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Richard Wendorf, ed., *Articulate Images—The Sister Arts from Hogarth to Tennyson*

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## ARTICULATE IMAGES



Richard Wendorf

Richard Wendorf, ed. *Articulate Images—The Sister Arts from Hogarth to Tennyson*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983. 272 pp., illus.; includes bibliography of works of Jean H. Hagstrum and a checklist of modern scholarship on the Sister Arts. \$29.50.

Reviewed by Anne K. Mellor

we must train ourselves to visualize all the elements described in an eighteenth-century poem, that we must be able to *see* them, because the very definition of poetic genius in that century was the capacity to create mental pictures. Eighteenth-century poetry calculatedly explored the various dimensions of this pictorialist project: the depiction of darkness as well as light, the difficulty of seeing, the search for an adequate point of view, and finally the pain of eyestrain or *fear* of seeing. Lipking provides illuminating discussions of poems by Pope, Smart, Collins and Gray to illustrate both his summary of the modes of eighteenth-century pictorialism and his argument that it broke down as people gradually came to think primarily in terms of words or photographic images rather than created mental pictures.

Robert Wark, writing from the perspective of the art historian and connoisseur, very sensibly reminds us of the difficulties faced by any student of literature who attempts to use pictorial evidence; that the assignment of any given art work to a particular artist is often problematic (as we have seen most recently in *The Discovery of Constable*, the magisterial study by Ian Fleming-Williams and Leslie Parris of Constable forgeries and misattributions); that the artist's choice of media plays a large role in determining the effects that can be created; and most important, that the interpretation of the meaning of visual images depends to a far greater degree than in literature on a traditional iconology and on inherited pictorial conventions.

As background to the essays which deal with specific comparisons between the sister arts, Larry Silver contributes a helpful survey of the development of the *paragone*, the debate between the relative merits of poetry and painting, from Alberti through the eighteenth century, with particular emphasis on how painting justified its claim to equality by its focus on moral exempla, its appeal to the higher sense of sight, and its greater capacity for *inventio* as demonstrated by ekphrastic works. Earl Miner shows us how limiting our western, classical assumptions concerning the relationship between art and nature can be by examining a Japanese text, Kyoden/Masanobu's illuminated *Edo Mumare*, which defies western conceptions of the artist as a single "self" and of the art-work as mimetic. Instead, Miner's fascinating discussion emphasizes, Japanese aesthetics are "relational," with meaning generated entirely out of the play of one signifier with another in a field where there is constant "leakage" between written word and visual image. Richard Wendorf's competent examination of biography and portrait painting as sister arts rightly stresses the difference that the medium makes: biography can encompass the passage of time while portraiture can capture only a single, albeit more self-conscious, moment in the sitter's life. And Karl Kroeber fittingly closes the volume with a detailed examination of four texts, Millais' "The

The nine essays in this *festschrift* for Jean H. Hagstrum both document the enormous impact Hagstrum has had on the study of the sister arts tradition and also achieve to a remarkably consistent degree that learned elegance we have come to expect of Hagstrum's own work. The ideal introduction both to this volume and to the significance of Hagstrum's work is provided by Lawrence Lipking in his essay "Quick Poetic Eyes: Another Look at Literary Pictorialism," in which he restates Hagstrum's thesis on eighteenth-century pictorialism in a simpler and more controversial way. He suggests that

Blind Girl," Constable's "Salisbury Cathedral, From the Meadows," Wordsworth's "Michael" and Tennyson's "Enoch Arden," that persuasively develops into the provocative suggestion that Victorian art asks us to stand back and see clearly one meaning, while Romantic art engages us in that very flux of experienced sensation that denies clarity of meaning. He further suggests that Victorian art, in its emphasis on making the reader see, is closer to Modern art than is Romantic art and also, he might have added, looking back at Lipking's essay, to eighteenth-century pictorial art.

The three essays on Blake's "composite art" (Hagstrum's term, of course) will be of special interest to readers of *Blake*. Ronald Paulson's discussion of "Blake's Revolutionary Tiger" usefully situates the poem within the context of an anti-jacobin rhetoric that frequently identified the bestial French revolutionaries as tigers but falls into that strong mis-reading heralded by Harold Bloom and represents the voice of the poem as that of the outraged Burke. While Paulson's essay contains several scattered insights, it too closely resembles a patchwork quilt of pieces stitched together haphazardly from other essays and fails to develop a cogent argument of its own.

Morton Paley's study of Blake's use of architecture, both as visual structure and as symbol, masterfully documents an important and unjustifiably neglected dimension of Blake's thought and practice. He first surveys the seven periods of architectural styles that appear in Blake's works, Egyptian, Eastern, Classical, Druid, Gothic, Baroque and contemporary, and carefully defines the meaning each style had for Blake, usefully adding the caveat that in many cases, the meaning of a given style depends on its pictorial context—this is particularly true of Blake's use of neoclassical motifs. Paley then examines the significance of particular architectural types, such as altars, walls, stairways (spiritually spiral or oppressively slab), doorways, superstructures, and cottages, and concludes with an insightful discussion of Golgonooza and the city of Jerusalem as the perpetually rebuilding Temple and Tabernacle of Christ.

W.J.T. Mitchell's analysis of the vortex as both iconic image and structuring form in the work of Hogarth, Turner and Blake brilliantly traces the transformation of the vortex from Hogarth's S-line of beauty, carefully contained within a stable neoclassical form, through Turner's identification of the vortex with the very flux of chaotic nature, showing that the vortex functions in Turner's art simultaneously as structural pattern and as a signifier of perpetual death and renewal, most notably in his great late paintings of the Deluge and the Apocalypse. Mitchell then discusses Blake's all-encompassing vortex as both the contrary and the instrument of vision, manifested most seminally in "Newton" and the text of *Milton*. After commenting on the

Vorticists' transformation of the vortex as a kind of image into every image as a kind of vortex, Mitchell reminds us that "image-magic operates not just at the explicit level of iconographic representation, but in those structures or spaces that organize the way we think about history, logic, or the human condition itself. The demystification of these subliminal idolatries will be the goal of a truly historical iconology." The essays in this handsomely illustrated volume have made some notable progress toward this goal, a goal that Jean Hagstrum himself, albeit in different terms, established for us. For the sister arts, this process of demystification is doubly complex, since it requires that we bring to consciousness not only what has been thought but the very shapes—both aural and visual—in which that thinking has occurred.

**Stewart Crehan. *Blake in Context*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press [Dublin: Gill and Macmillan], 1984. 364 pp. \$47.50**

**Reviewed by Stuart Peterfreund**

The context to which Stewart Crehan's title refers is specified in the introduction to his study, which has as its "main concern . . . the social and historical context within which an artist such as Blake emerges, and how this context makes necessary a revolution in artistic form and practice" (p. 13). Writers such as Bronowski, Schorer, and above all, Erdman, have dealt with precisely this context, but not, apparently, to Crehan's satisfaction. In his view, the discussion of Blake's artistic form and practice has been dominated by "formalists" such as Erdman and Anne K. Mellor (see pp. 240-45), who hold power in the academy and insist that the ideology in Blake's art be de-emphasized or ignored outright. Crehan's conception of his mission, then, much like Edward Said's conception of the deconstructionist enterprise (see "The Problem of Textuality," *Critical Inquiry*, 4 [1978], 673-714), is that of a rescue, a recapturing of scholarly territory held by hostile colonialist forces. In Crehan's own words, "As long as the formalists continue to hold sway in all discussions of art and literature, the historical materialist approach will repeatedly stress art's historical and class content, guided by an understanding of the primacy of social laws over artistic ones" (p. 13).

The preceding quotation suggests what Crehan elsewhere states forthrightly: the basis of his approach to Blake is Marxist, carried out with the intent of study-