Medieval monumental sculpture (Kalamazoo, 10-13 May 07)

H-ArtHist (Carolin Behrmann)

Call for Papers

NEW APPROACHES TO MEDIEVAL MONUMENTAL SCULPTURE

42nd Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo (Michigan), May 10-13, 2007

Session sponsored by the
International Center of Medieval Art

Organizers:
Jacqueline E. Jung, University of California, Berkeley
Gerhard Lutz, Dom-Museum Hildesheim

The last thirty years have witnessed fundamental changes in research on medieval sculpture. Until the 1960s, the field was dominated by approaches that focused on either style (as represented by Erwin Panofsky's 1924 tome on Die deutsche Plastik des 11. bis 13. Jahrhunderts and Meyer Schapiro's analyses of Romanesque sculpture) or iconography (under the influence of Émile Mâle's interpretations of French Gothic portals). New aspects arose in the wake of larger disciplinary changes in the 1970s and '80s; although concentrating on sculptural works not attached to architecture, Michael Baxandall's 1980 study The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany exemplifies in many respects the interests and methods that have come to shape contemporary studies. Technical questions have moved increasingly into the foreground, prompting discussion not only of the factors of economy and patronage that contributed to the creation of sculpted images but also of the artist's workshop conditions. Removing sculptures from the isolation of purely stylistic analysis, scholars have given increasing attention to the political and intellectual factors behind an image's design as well as to the devotional beliefs and practices that animated the image for historical viewers.
Yet even as we have sought to enrich our understanding of the artifact's meaning through such contextualization, the unique formal properties of sculpture as a three-dimensional medium, so crucial to scholars from Panofsky to Baxandall, have slipped increasingly from view.
If methodological questions were hotly debated in the art history of the 1970s and 80s, scholars of medieval monumental sculpture now find

themselves in a sea of (relative) tranquillity. In North America, this takes the form, paradoxically, of an almost total neglect of sculpture – its placement, functions, tactile properties and the modes of perception it requires – in favour of manuscript painting and the text-image problems, narrative structures, and devotional functions peculiar to that medium. By contrast, sculpture remains central to European medievalism; along with the numerous case studies still being produced there, which sometimes display novel methodological perspectives, scholarship abroad has also pursued important new research avenues barely touched upon in the English-speaking world – for example, the German "Bildwissenschaft" championed by Hans Belting and Horst
Bredekamp, which treats the work of art as an embodied, communicative " medium" whose material presence is inextricable from its socially and psychically constructive function. The time is ripe to build bridges between these two sides – to pull together the methodological developments of the preceding decades on both sides of the Atlantic, to look closely at the current state of research on medieval sculpture, and to open up new avenues for future research. We invite both seasoned scholars and younger art historians from all countries and with various methodological backgrounds to contribute their perspectives, whether in the form of case studies that take seriously their own methodological relevance or broader overviews of the issues involved in studying figural arts in three dimensions.

Deadline for the submission of paper proposals: September 15, 2006
The ICMA requires that participants in sponsored sessions be a member at the time that they deliver the paper. Submissions require a 300 word abstract, and an abstract cover sheet available at http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/congress/42cfp/forms.html.

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