BOOK REVIEW

The Art of the Sublime: Principles of Christian Art and Architecture, Roger Homan (Ashgate Publishing Limited 2006), 213 pp, £50.00 hbk

The Art of the Sublime reassesses the principles of ecclesiastical art and architecture, in order to trace a lineage of the visual arts within Christianity as an aesthetic guided by morality and belief. From Illuminated manuscripts to Shaker furniture, from the Medieval revivalism of Arts and Crafts to puritan iconoclasm, to expressions of ‘popular’ religion and above all, to the rivalry of gothic, classical and baroque, integrity becomes a key term applied to conventional aesthetics.

The book is therefore premised upon the founding value, within art and architecture, of the sacred before all aesthetic values, or rather that ‘true’ aesthetic values are intrinsically wedded to an artistic and functional integrity rooted in Christian devotion. Homan associates such a stance with Ruskin, for whom truthfulness and steadfastness of spirit were as much a feature of genuine artistic expression as imaginative and formal qualities. It is this association of beauty with morality that Homan’s book aims to reclaim.

In his accomplished discussion of the gothic, particularly, the direction of his project becomes explicit. Gothic emerges as the exemplar par excellence, standing as it does in Homan’s view for aspiration, for integrity of spirit, and for aesthetic principles of ‘truth to materials’. Indeed, as Homan reminds us, for Pugin it represented the truest artistic expression of theological truth. Thus the guiding presence of both Pugin’s and Ruskin’s principles of morality in art is apparent throughout.

Hand-in-hand with such principles is a sense of art not as an end in itself but as the means to an end. Homan settles on the icon as the supreme example of this principle, as an aesthetic that resists all art critique and is interested only in questions of integrity. Icons function at a spiritual rather than material level, and when displayed as works of art lose all purpose; indeed, he argues, they cease to be icons at all.

In criticism, for so comprehensive a study there is a marked absence of art beyond the 1960s. In fact, Homan displays an evident distaste for contemporary expressions of religious themes, in favour of more traditional forms. This devalues the plurality of experiences of art and undermines what he later upholds as the primary principle of visual images within a context of faith – the extent to which they are expressive of the religious experience of the user.

Furthermore, though the art discussed is considered in terms of, for example, beauty or holiness, the sublime as a category is rarely touched upon – a strange omission considering the title of the book. Even when, in the conclusion, Homan introduces Hegel’s distinction of pagan art as the art of the beautiful and Christian art as the art of the sublime, he neglects to mine the richly contentious quality of this difference as a benchmark against which to form a discussion. No doubt Homan feels that the presence of the sublime is implied throughout, but considering its ubiquity in art historical narratives of beauty and sanctity a case could be argued for its more explicit inclusion.

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Early Christian art and architecture - works of art exhibiting Christian themes and structures designed for Christian worship created relatively soon after the death of Jesus. Most date from the 4th to the 6th cent. AD See also Christian iconography under iconography. Earliest Works. Little is known about Christian art in the first two centuries after the death of Jesus. The sculpture of the stone sarcophagus was extensively practiced in Roman art and was continued into the Christian era. In some cases subjects similar to those of the catacombs were used. In others, scenes of the life of Jesus or more ceremonious compositions were created, showing the enthroned Christ receiving the homage of the apostles. View Contemporary Sublime Research Papers on Academia.edu for free. This article reviews the notion of the sublime as it is regarded in a few of the most influential texts in Western philosophy. Modern sublime that is elaborated in the works of Edmund Burke and Kant is influenced by the ancient text Peri more. This article reviews the notion of the sublime as it is regarded in a few of the most influential texts in Western philosophy. The sublime is necessarily linked to art. It is the notion that presents existential (spiritual) questions such as existence of God and meaning of human life. Art has been the realm where such questions are tackled. Sublime is the artistic way to spirituality, and works of Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko display that. Save to Library. Download. Through the ages, books have shaped architectural discourse and culture at least as much as buildings have. From manifestos to monographs to memoirs, architects have reimagined themselves as authors to communicate their ideas, elevate their status to that of intellectuals rather than builders, and promote their work to the world. While the AR has long included reviews of recent publications, The book of books seeks to make more of these appraisals, dedicating an insert in select issues to books which frame and elaborate the themes through which we explore architecture; giving weight to the wri