
Anachronic Renaissance seeks to take conventional notions of chronology, temporality and authenticity that dominate western art historical research and turn them on their heads. According to the authors, modern art history suffers from "chronological complacency" that moors a work of art firmly to the moment of its creation, serving as a testimonial to that moment in history. Conversely, Nagel and Wood contend that art undergoes temporal journeys and fluctuations that require us to look "backward to a remote ancestral origin, to a prior artifact or image;" forward to how future audiences might interpret and rework art’s meaning, or even to the timeless, divine realm. The use of the word “anachronic” (as opposed to anachronistic) in the title speaks to this very hypothesis: the ability of art to exist in constantly shifting temporalities that fold time onto itself and bend the traditional linear timeline in which we study art.

Wedded to the idea of art’s simultaneous temporality is the struggle to define what is authentic versus what is a forgery, an especially contentious question during the Renaissance. In this vein, Nagel and Wood tackle the fascinating question of Christ’s true identity. Can it be found in statues created by Christ’s supposed contemporaries or are miraculous images formed by a divine source, like the Shroud of Turin, the purest evidence to Christ’s visage? The scholarship and research that went into composing Anachronic Renaissance is manifest when reading any of the book’s chapters; paragraphs are heavily annotated with primary and secondary source material and works that are normally glanced over in art historical scholarship, such as an obscure engraving of the Madonna of Loreto, are given ample, unprecedented exploration.

The dense prose, sophisticated vocabulary and allusions to lesser-known works of art indicate that this book is best suited for the experienced art researcher and thus is recommended for museum libraries supporting Renaissance art collections and academic libraries that serve art history graduate students and faculty, particularly those engaged in Renaissance art research and theory courses.

Although Anachronic Renaissance is best read as "a story, a sequence of interrelated episodes," the short chapters can be consumed as independent examinations. Ample white space and a multitude of thoughtfully placed images allow for a comfortable reading pace, and readers will hardly miss the presence of any full-color plates. Researchers will be pleased to find an extensive notes section, divided by chapter, at the end of the book along with a detailed index. As is customary with Zone Books, Anachronic Renaissance’s handsome design and sturdy construction is sure to elicit and withstand many deserved readings.

Kimberly Detterbeck, Visual Arts Reference and Instruction Librarian, Frostburg State University, kadetterbeck@frostburg.edu