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Review of Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East & West*.

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Lisa Jardine and Jerry Brotton, *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East & West*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2000. 223 pp. ISBN 080143808X.

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Global Interests, co-authored by the historian Lisa Jardine and the comparatist Jerry Brotton, concerns the claims on various forms of imagery and myth made by allied and enemy states in the 15th and 16th centuries. Though the book makes passing comments about several familiar Renaissance texts, and gives considerable attention to Spenser's *Fairie Queene*, it is largely a book about art; above all, the book sets out to exemplify an approach to the historical interpretation of objects. The pun in the title suggests at least three of the book's broad arguments: that commissions for objects now conventionally treated as 'art' often arose in the context of empire-building, and participated in their patrons' attempts to establish themselves as real and symbolic world powers; that the imagery and ideas those patrons promoted with such objects often moved between rival political entities; and that the cultural concerns that such objects announced were inseparable from the other dominions in which rulers wanted to have a share. Approaching art as a matter of politics, the authors propose to think of such works as a kind of currency, and to think of their creation and exchange as 'transactions.' The advantage of such a perspective, the authors suggest, is that it can acknowledge how works emerge and circulate in response to specific historical and political exigencies. The book relies on the ability of imagery to transcend linguistic difference and to maintain connotations in different cultural circumstances, but it disputes the idea that it is the timelessness, the antiquity, or even the universality of imagery that lends it meaning and power.

Jardine and Brotton make these arguments through a series of case studies, all of which resonate with the two writers' impressive erudition, and which frequently illuminate their objects in surprising ways. We are shown, for example, how a Venetian depiction of St. George, despite, or even because of, its narratives of victory, could constitute 'an ideologically defensive gesture,' helplessly acknowledging the real military power of the Turks, and overwhelming its ostensible hero with the riches of his Ottoman field. We see how the portrait medal given to the participants at the Council of Florence (a council aimed at allying the usually antagonistic Eastern and Western Christian churches), took every aspect of its imagery from Byzantine subjects, yet incorporated that imagery into a format that Italian humanists would have considered their own. We watch the sophisticated strategy by which Emperor Charles V's tapestry commissions, which advertised his military victory at Tunis, vitiated the claims that King Francis I of France had made in his own tapestry series, featuring Scipio Africanus, only a few years before. And we discover the wide range of associations contemporaries would have made with equestrian imagery, which responded not only to such famous icons as the Marcus Aurelius statue in Rome (then thought to depict Constantine, a central figure for both East and West), but also an Ottoman rider type known from the reverse of a Mehmet II portrait medal. Depicted horses, the authors compellingly demonstrate, could always remind viewers not only of the importance of real horses for the new types of armies winning in the field, but also of the fact that centers for horse breeding itself, crucial to these new arts of war, were located in the East.

As all of this suggests, the authors pursue their theses across a broad historical and geographical terrain, and scholars from numerous disciplines will have much to learn from their book (another

sense to the book's title, perhaps, is that its authors' interests are, and that their readers' should be, global). As a book mostly about images, however, some of the book's most polemical passages are directed at those who make a profession of studying art: "We are signalling the need for a shift in mentality on the part of art historians and cultural historians," the authors summarize in their concluding pages. The charge here is that art history, proceeding under the influence of Erwin Panofsky and his ilk, takes the humaneness of Renaissance creativity for granted (65-71, 116-17). Whereas Panofsky's followers might believe that tapestries like King Francis's were "mysteriously imbued with some classically derived iconographic value," the authors insist, by contrast, that such tapestries are "politically and visually overdetermined material objects," whose "encoded meanings were appropriated and fought over by competing political figures." Whereas Panofsky allowed that the naturalism, grace, vividness, or expressiveness of a Renaissance image might point to "an acutely observed and felt psychological realism," and consequently to the origins of a modern, Western, civilized self, the authors would insert the images instead into a much darker *Realpolitik* of conquest and self-promotion.

Readers of these passages might ask whether it is really possible to identify contemporary art history with this part of the Panofskian legacy; they might wonder what the authors think, for example, about today's versions of the social history of art or the history of style, or about the many studies from the last several decades that deal explicitly with the relationship between Europe and the East (as well as with Europe and the Americas). At the very least, however, the authors' charges force readers to ask how such studies are to be reconciled with today's more nuanced analyses of Renaissance humanism. As the authors themselves demonstrate, even material of the sort Panofsky studied, the ancient texts that seemed most topical to Renaissance readers, those that spurred the invention of images, worked between East and West. One of the epigraphs of the book's first chapter alerts us that Ciriac of Ancona read Roman classics to Mehmet II. In the West, it could be added, philosophers regarded Averroes as an authority on a par with Aristotle, and philologists learned the Greek they needed to get at Plato from Byzantine scholars (these scholars themselves often displaced by Ottoman conquests); those interested in chemistry and in the arts of fire read Geber, while scientists and artists alike took principles of their optics from Alhazen. To what degree, it might be asked, do political 'transactions' also carry implications for, say, the history of naturalism, or of classicism?

Perhaps because of its polemic, *Global Interests* is largely a book about patronage. On the whole, it restricts the responsibility both of artists themselves, and of the poets and philologists on whom their creations depended, for the works rulers sought. With the exception of some interesting observations about tapestry production, moreover, its analyses focus largely on the pictorial dimensions of objects, and give little attention to facture. Given the authors' injunction to treat artworks as 'material objects,' however, it is tempting to think more about these areas, too. Not only the protagonists and subject matter of images, after all, but their very materials and techniques, were explored East and West. Colored stones and ivory came from Asia. The copper needed for bronze, East and West, was mined in the border territories of the Ottoman and Holy Roman Empires. (The metals in Pietro Tacca's equestrian portrait of Grand Duke Ferdinando I in Florence--to stay with a genre central to the authors' interests--came, according to its inscription, from captured 'Thracian' arms). Mosaics, porcelain, banded masonry, and even domes, moreover--not to mention 'arabesques,' 'moresques,' and other aniconic, non-narrative forms of

representation--could evoke and challenge the world outside of Europe. Wouldn't the manners in which objects were generated--a large part of their 'art'--itself contribute to those objects' power? When one realizes how the 'hands' of Leonardo, Raphael, Titian, or the other artists treated in the book themselves became, in various senses, objects of exchange, it is difficult to imagine that the kinds of knowledge that allowed the very creation of objects was not itself part of the contests the authors study.

None of this, of course, detracts from the authors' central claims. As Jardine and Brotton themselves write in their introduction, their book is but the tip of a very large iceberg. Part of its fascination will reside in the discovery of all that its lessons, all that the new mentalities it recommends, might reach. In the end, to expand our sense of the interests that were global can only add to the force of the authors' thesis, and recommend their challenge to a wide audience.