Some Thoughts About Art, History, And the Search for Truth

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IN HIS ESSAY ON PLATO and the computer, Philip Novak has addressed the question of the proper place of philosophy in a world which seems dominated by technological concerns. He has also written persuasively of the role of philosophy as a discipline within the more narrow confines of the Dominican College curriculum. As an art historian who believes that some of the concerns of art history are akin to those normally assigned to philosophers, I share with him a desire to re-establish the relevance of philosophical inquiry—not only to undergraduate education, but also to the larger world outside our college borders.

In particular, it is the inquiry into the nature of reality and the consideration of what it means to say that something is real which seem to me to be tasks shared by the disciplines of philosophy and art history. That these are tasks which traditionally have been assigned to philosophers is obvious, but what is probably less clear is the degree to which they should be concerns of the art historian. Just what is art history anyway? Is it merely the illustration of historical events? Is it, as I suspect many students (and more than a few colleagues) suppose, only a somewhat glorified version of
"art appreciation?" The answer is not a simple one. Certainly it is hoped that in studying art history one will develop an appreciation of the visual arts, but the relevance of the subject to a liberal arts education goes far beyond the ability to recognize and enjoy specific examples of painting, sculpture and architecture. Art history is more than just art appreciation because it is a discipline which is dependent upon an understanding of the historical and cultural context in which works of art have been created. When and where a work of art was produced, together with the ideas and values of the society from which it came, have everything to do with the style of that work—with the way it looks and the reasons for which it looks that way. Art with a capital "A"—the art which is the subject matter of art history—is more than just the personal expression of an individual artist: it is an expression of the spirit of the age in which it was created. To understand such art and to appreciate it fully, it is necessary to attempt to see it not only through our own eyes, but also through the eyes of those who produced it. What was the conception of reality at the time when the work was created? What was man's understanding of the universe, his place within it, his relationship to God? What constituted truth? In short, how was reality defined? These are the sorts of questions which must be considered if one is truly to comprehend the meaning of a work of art, and it is in attempting to answer them that the art historian enters into the realm of philosophical inquiry.

For many beginning students of art history, the art of the early Middle Ages is particularly challenging and difficult because it seems to bear little relationship to their own conceptions of reality. It is, in fact, an art which is decidedly "unrealistic." When first encountering a work such as the early medieval depiction of St. Matthew from the illuminated manuscript known as the Gospels of St. Willibrord (figure 1), I have no doubt that many students suspect that it is less an expression of the spirit of the age than it is evidence that the unknown artist was simply incapable of "making it look right." Certainly, with the extreme stylization of the human figure, the flattening of the spatial context in which the figure is placed, and the decorative rather than naturalistic use of color, the work displays an almost blatant disregard for fidelity to the world of natural appearance. Does this mean, however, that the artist was less skilled than painters whose work more accurately reflects the visible world, or does it perhaps express a concept of reality which could not be depicted by "realistic" rendering?

In considering this question it is necessary to reflect upon the nature and function of medieval art in general and of the illuminated manuscript in particular. Put in the simplest way, it may be said that the primary purpose of art in the Christian world of the early Middle Ages was the glorification of God, and that the principal artistic form of such glorification was the illuminated manuscript. As the term suggests, manuscript illumination
Figure 1. Symbol of St. Matthew, Gospels of St. Willibrord, ca. 690
was intended to illuminate (to celebrate and shed light upon) the written word, and in the monastic scriptoria of the seventh and eighth centuries the written word was synonymous with the Word of God as found in the Bible. It would be difficult to overstate the importance of "the Word" to the artist-monks of the early Middle Ages, for they took quite literally the pronouncement of St. John that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The supernatural world of God, not the physical world of man, was where reality was to be found, and it was the Word which represented that which was real and that which was true. In seeking to illuminate the Word and to celebrate the reality which it represented, medieval artists did not try to imitate the natural world but sought rather to relate their art to the written text as it appeared on the flat page. To put it another way: if reality resides in the Word, and the Word is to be found on the page of a book, then it is to the two dimensional page with its written text that the artist's forms must relate if they are to have any relationship with what is real. It would not have occurred to the anonymous artist of the St. Willibrord Gospels that anyone might think that, in his effort to create a convincing depiction of what is real, he was attempting to imitate faithfully the forms of the natural world or to place them within an illusionistic setting of three dimensional space. Rather than seeking to reproduce what he might see before him in the natural world (human figure, chair, book), he sought to create forms which would be understood as visual symbols for a supernatural reality which had nothing to do with the world of appearances and could only be understood in terms of the Word of God.

If we could look at the painting of St. Matthew through early medieval eyes, we would recognize at once that we are not looking at a "portrait" of St. Matthew, but rather at an intentionally two dimensional symbol for him and for the Gospel which bears his name. Such a symbol would have been instantly recognizable to the Christians of the Middle Ages who would also have understood that "medieval art was before all things a symbolic art in which form is used merely as a vehicle of spiritual meaning."1 In our particular example, the St. Matthew symbol—the image of man (imago hominis)—is further identified by the written title and by the introductory words of the Gospel which appear on the book held in front of the figure. Understood as symbol, whose purpose is to take the viewer's thoughts from the physical world and to focus them on the reality of the Word of God (as found in the text of the Gospel), the entire composition may be seen as a powerful and convincing reflection of the artist's concept of what is real. Taken as a whole, it is a composition which truly does illuminate the words of the Gospel by reminding the viewer that it is only through those words that he will come to know the truth.
The figure of St. Matthew is but one of the paintings from the Gospels of St. Willibrord—a Gospel book which contains some of the very best examples of the art of the early Middle Ages and represents a high point of the Hiberno-Saxon manuscript illumination produced in the monasteries of Ireland and Northumbria during the seventh and eighth centuries.\(^2\) Dating from the last decade of the seventh century, the work was named and probably produced for St. Willibrord, a Northumbrian missionary who journeyed to northern Europe to convert the Frisians in 690. Also known as the Echternach Gospels, the book has been attributed by some scholars to the monastery which St. Willibrord founded at Echternach (Luxembourg) in 698, but stylistic relationships with other Gospel books suggest that it was painted in Northumbria (northern England), possibly at the holy island of Lindisfarne.\(^3\) In addition to the symbol for St. Matthew, the book contains full page symbolic compositions to illuminate the texts of the Gospels of St. Mark (lion), St. Luke (calf-like ox) and St. John (eagle). The beginning of each Gospel is further illuminated by decorated letters which repeat the interlace motif found in the decoratively framed border surrounding the symbol of St. Matthew. These decorated letters—the design of which shows the influence of pagan metal work\(^4\)—serve to focus attention upon the written text and to reinforce the emphasis upon the divine Word as the primary determinant of what is real.

In her essay on Celtic Christian Ireland, Sister Barbara Green has given us a vivid picture of the culture which produced the early medieval Hiberno-Saxon manuscript illuminations. She is, I think, also quite correct when she suggests that "Irish art is more conceptual than representational" for it seems clear that the artist-monks of the seventh and eighth centuries sought to depict that which they considered to be real in terms of idea (concept) rather than in terms of natural appearance. In our example it is the idea of the chair upon which St. Matthew sits that is depicted rather than the actual appearance of that chair. Every element within the composition is treated as a separate and independent concept, and the forms which are chosen to symbolize those concepts are related to one another in terms of two dimensional pattern rather than by any system which might suggest a three dimensional spatial context. Such patterns, however, are far more than just attractive decoration and design. Taken together they are images which reflect the artist's concept of reality—a reality which is not to be found in the physical world of man and nature, but rather in the divine Word of God as transmitted through the written text of the Gospels. What at first glance may seem evidence of an artist's inability to handle problems of representation and spatial organization is seen upon closer examination to be a conscious effort to reject the appearances of the natural world and to depict instead symbolic images of the supernatural world of God as revealed in the written Word.
As Sr. Barbara has stated, “the most famous, ornate and highly sophisticated” of the Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts is the Book of Kells. Produced at least one hundred years after the Gospels of St. Willibrord, the Book of Kells nevertheless shares many stylistic characteristics with the earlier work and lends considerable support to the thesis that there is a direct relationship between artistic style and the prevailing conception of reality in any given society or culture. Although more elaborate than the illuminated pages of the St. Willibrord Gospels, the paintings in the Book of Kells are still blatantly two dimensional (flat) and decorative, giving evidence of the same lack of concern for the depiction of objects and events within a convincing three dimensional setting. This is not to say that the scenes within these marvelous paintings are unrelated to reality, but rather that they are, like those in the earlier book, based upon a system of design which reflects a belief that reality lies beyond the world of natural appearances.

Over six hundred years separate the art of the early Middle Ages from the art of the Renaissance. The differences between the *Madonna and Child Attended by Angels* from the Book of Kells (figure 2) and a painting of the same subject by the fifteenth-century Italian artist, Masaccio (figure 3), are dramatic, and a student might well assume that those differences represent six hundred years of improvement in technique. But is that actually the case? Certainly the figures in Masaccio’s painting are more “realistic” (naturalistic) than those from the Book of Kells. In contrast to the flat forms of the early medieval work those of Masaccio’s *Madonna Enthroned* seem to have weight and substance and exist in a spatial context which has depth as well as height and width. The two angels seated at the feet of the Virgin are particularly convincing as they seem to project both back into the pictorial space and forward into the actual space inhabited by the viewer. Such “realism” is in marked contrast to the art of the early Middle Ages, but does it thus follow that the six hundred years which separate Masaccio’s painting from the Book of Kells represent six hundred years of improvement in the ability of artists to make things “look right?” I think not, and would suggest instead that the changes in style which are evident in the two works are reflective of fundamental changes in ideas about what constitutes that which is real.

The style of the St. Willibrord Gospels and of the Book of Kells is consistent with a world view which was widely held throughout the early medieval monasteries of Ireland, Scotland and Northumbria. As long as the physical world was understood as only a pale reflection of what was real, there was no incentive to devise artistic means to reproduce it. As long as it was believed that all truth and knowledge had the Word of God as the ultimate source, there was no reason for an artist to concern himself with the imitation of the way things appear in the natural world. Truth was to be found in the divine Word, and as the purpose of art was to illuminate and
Figure 3. Masaccio, *Madonna Enthroned*, 1426
glorify that Word, artists needed only to relate their work to the two dimensional context of the page upon which the Word was written. It was not until man began to look at the physical world as evidence of God's presence and began to believe that one might come to know the truth and to understand the meaning of reality by a study of that world that it became necessary to develop a system which would accurately represent what he saw.

As anyone who has studied the Italian Renaissance will know, the forces which brought about the "rebirth" were many and complex. Changes in political, economic and social organization were accompanied by changes in philosophical and theological ideas as the world view of medieval man gave way to one which was less God-centered and which placed a new emphasis upon the dignity of man and upon the importance of human activity in the natural world. These changes did not take place overnight, and the corresponding changes in art which are evident from our two Madonnas did not occur without many intervening steps. Nevertheless, the two paintings are dramatic evidence of a changed conception of reality. That Masaccio's work may look more "realistic" to us today is not to say that it is more real, but rather that our conception of reality is closer to the Renaissance world view than it is to that of the Middle Ages.

Could the early medieval artist have painted more like Masaccio if he had wished? The answer to that question is difficult at best. Certainly there are examples in medieval art of life-like details which suggest that the artist has attempted to imitate the outward appearance of objects in the natural world, but, with few exceptions, medieval art is virtually lacking in examples of a convincingly rendered three dimensional spatial context. There is no evidence to suggest that the medieval artist was bothered by this, and indeed, ample evidence to the contrary—that the illusion of empty space separate from the objects which it enclosed was something to be avoided. It is only when the medieval view of reality began to be modified by an increased attention to the natural world that artists began to feel the need of developing pictorial techniques which would suggest that the world of natural appearance was something to be studied and reproduced.

The artist who is usually given credit for the first convincing attempts at imitating the world of natural appearances is Giotto—a fourteenth-century Italian painter who is known as the father of Renaissance art. But if it is Giotto who takes the first steps toward an art which is in tune with the changes taking place in the rest of western civilization, it is Masaccio who must be considered as the first painter to master the technique of linear perspective—the scientific and mathematical way of creating the illusion of three dimensional space on a flat surface. Born in 1401, Masaccio lived only twenty-seven years, but in that short span of life he made significant
contributions to directing the art of painting towards a new naturalism based upon direct observation of the natural world.

Masaccio's art, like that of the painters who followed him, was based upon an understanding of the rules of linear perspective which had first been demonstrated by the architect Filippo Brunelleschi in 1425. There is still much scholarly debate as to whether Brunelleschi invented linear perspective or simply rediscovered it after its abandonment by artists during the Middle Ages, but there is no disagreement as to his role as the one who introduced it to the Italian Renaissance. Brunelleschi's experiments with the principles of linear perspective grew out of his desire, as an architect, to provide his clients with a visually accurate depiction of what a building would look like before it was built. Essentially a means of creating the illusion of three dimensional space, linear perspective allowed for the construction of a "realistic" spatial continuum in which separate objects could be depicted in accurate relationships to each other as they appear to the human eye.

The key to unlocking the secret of linear perspective lay in Brunelleschi's discovery of the vanishing point—the point in space at which parallel lines appear to converge. The concept of the vanishing point may be easily understood if one imagines oneself standing on a railroad track (or on a long, straight highway) and observing that, as they recede into the distance, the parallel rails (or sides of the highway) seem to come together at a single point. In the theory of linear perspective this point of convergence is called the vanishing point. Medieval artists, with their conceptual approach to depicting reality, had no interest in the vanishing point because they knew that parallel lines do not converge at a single point even though they appear to do so. The reality of the highway is that its edges are always parallel and never come together. To the medieval mind the fact that the sides of the highway appear to come together in the distance was simply evidence that appearances had little to do with truth or with what was real. To the Renaissance artist of the fifteenth century, however, the laws of optics and geometry which governed those appearances were considered to be equivalent to the same laws with which God governed the universe.

Although we do not know for certain how Brunelleschi came to understand the significance of the vanishing point, there is convincing evidence that his discovery resulted from experiments with mirrors. If one stands in front of a mirror and observes the objects which are reflected there, it soon becomes evident that all lines (edges of objects) which are perpendicular to the surface of the mirror will, if projected far enough back into space, appear to converge at a point which corresponds to the position of one's own eyes (as are also reflected in the mirror). The eye position of the observer (the one standing in front of the mirror) is thus seen to be directly related to the vanishing point at which all parallel lines appear to converge.
Probably working with mirrors in just such a manner, Brunelleschi made the discovery that the key to depicting objects as they appear to the human eye lay in constructing a picture so that all lines which are meant to appear perpendicular to the surface and receding back into space converge (if extended) at a single point in the distant background. When a picture is so constructed, if the viewer positions his eye directly opposite this point (the vanishing point) the painting will appear to reproduce exactly that which would be observed by the eye of the viewer if the scene were actually taking place before him (figure 4). It was this understanding of the significance of the vanishing point which allowed Brunelleschi to formulate the principles of linear perspective and to apply them to his own architectural experiments. The result was a convincing depiction of natural space in which objects appear to be seen from a fixed viewing point and to become smaller the farther they are from the eye of the viewer.

Figure 4.

Such a system of pictorial construction was completely consistent with the changing view of reality which had been slowly evolving during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The love of nature and the belief that the natural world offered evidence of God's manifestation of Himself is implicit in the writings of St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226). The influential thirteenth-century Franciscan philosopher Roger Bacon (ca. 1220-1292), believed that God's master plan for the universe could be understood in terms of the laws of optics and geometry and that the application of those laws to the observation of natural appearances would lead to the revelation of truth.

And for the sake of all things in general let us recall to mind that nothing can be known concerning the things of this world without the power of geometry . . . because we can understand nothing fully unless its form is presented before our eyes, and therefore in the
scripture of God the whole knowledge of things to be defined by geometrical forms is contained and far better than mere philosophy could express it . . .

The changing beliefs about the relevance of the natural world (and the laws which govern it) to an understanding of ultimate truth brought about the need for a new way of depicting that world which went far beyond the requirements of the early Middle Ages. No longer would the abstract and symbolic imagery of the Hiberno-Saxon manuscript illuminations be sufficient to express a concept of reality which had been fundamentally altered. The value now placed upon the natural world and the growing belief that man stood at its center demanded that a method be found for its depiction in a manner which would be convincing to the eye as well as to the mind. Thus, I think it is fair to say that Brunelleschi’s discovery and application of the principles of linear perspective do not represent an “improvement” over the techniques of the medieval artists so much as they represent a uniquely appropriate means of accurately reflecting the changing beliefs about what constitutes that which is real.

Although Brunelleschi’s ideas about linear perspective were developed in response to his own needs as an architect, they were immediately recognized as having revolutionary implications for the arts of painting and sculpture. It was Brunelleschi’s young friend Masaccio who was the first to apply the principles of linear perspective to painting, but those principles were soon taken up by virtually every serious artist who came in contact with them. Masaccio’s most accomplished use of linear perspective is found in a large fresco of The Trinity (figure 5) which he painted for the Dominican Church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. So convincing is Masaccio’s illusion of a deep space “behind” the surface of the wall that many students, when first seeing a slide of this painting, mistakenly assume that they are looking at a photograph of a sculptured crucifix placed in a deep niche which has been hollowed out of the wall. When one actually encounters the fresco in the Church of Santa Maria Novella, the illusion is even more pronounced because Masaccio has fixed the vanishing point at the viewer’s eye level (just below the foot of the cross) and the scene appears exactly as it would if one were standing in front of a small chapel and not in front of a flat painting. The kneeling figures at either side of the “chapel” are fully life size and those within are slightly smaller as indeed they would appear if they were actually located in the space which seems to exist behind the surface of the wall. So accurately has Masaccio represented the spatial context of the scene that we can actually determine the dimensions of the barrel-vaulted chamber in which the Crucifixion appears to take place.
Figure 5. Masaccio, *The Holy Trinity*, 1428
Masaccio's painting is important not only for what it tells us about the
Renaissance belief that reality could be found in an earthly setting, but also
for what it tells us about the place of man within that setting. In the
Hiberno-Saxon manuscript illuminations of the early Middle Ages, an
accurate depiction of earthly space was deemed unnecessary because ulti-
mate reality was not to be found in the physical world. Man as an individual
counted for little in the early medieval conception of the universe, and the
earthly space which man inhabited was of little concern to the artist.
Masaccio's painting, however, reflects the Renaissance belief that God's
presence in the natural world not only makes it real, but also elevates man's
status within it. Using linear perspective to emphasize the importance of
human observation in the search for truth, Masaccio also includes two
figures in his composition which cannot be found in any biblical account
of the Crucifixion. The kneeling figures at either side of the painting are, in
fact, Florentine contemporaries of Masaccio—the donors who provided the
funds for the fresco. Their presence in the composition, together with the
implied participation in the scene by all who view it, is further evidence that
man now sees himself in a new and decidedly non-medieval relationship
with God and with what is real. Just as the idea that God manifests himself
in the natural world was responsible for the desire to depict that world
accurately, so too the belief that there is a relationship between being real
and being human brought about the desire to depict human activity in an
earthly setting which corresponded to that which could actually be seen. It
was the principles of linear perspective which allowed Masaccio and those
who followed him to construct a pictorial arena for human activity by
creating the illusion of a coherent spatial setting. To put it another way is to
say that a convincing depiction of human activity is dependent as much
upon the spatial setting in which that activity takes place as it is upon the
artist's ability to copy accurately the human form. The rules of linear
perspective provided the artists of the Renaissance with the means to create
that setting.

The principles of linear perspective were to govern painting for almost
five hundred years. Not until the early years of our own century did artists
begin to challenge systematically the idea that paintings composed accord-
ing to the rules articulated by Brunelleschi in 1425 represented the last
word in pictorial truth. In the interim, although styles had changed to
reflect changing ideas and values, the underlying assumptions about the
nature of reality and of man's place in the scheme of things were such that
linear perspective continued to serve the artist as a valid means for depict-
ing the truth. Even the abandonment of the belief in an earth-centered
universe did not cause man to doubt that reality was still to be found in the
visible world and that pictorial truth in art involved the representation of
things as they might be seen by the human eye. The concept of the
vanishing point, with its attendant implications that reality can be observed and understood from a fixed point of view, served the cause of pictorial truth as long as it was believed that reality was absolute and unchanging. When this belief was shattered in the early years of the twentieth century it was inevitable that the principles of linear perspective would be called into question as a valid means of depicting the real. Just as the medieval method of composition did not serve adequately to reflect the Renaissance conception of reality, so too does linear perspective now seem inadequate to define a reality understood in terms of Einstein's theory of relativity or Freud's ideas about the existence of the unconscious.

The abandonment of linear perspective by artists in the twentieth century was no less significant (nor less intentional) than was its adoption by artists in the fifteenth century. Although it might be tempting to assume that a work such as Pablo Picasso's *Girl before a Mirror* (figure 6) is the product of an artist less skilled than one trained in the principles of linear perspective, such an assumption would be mistaken. That Picasso had understood those principles and mastered their application is evident in his early *First Communion* (figure 7)—a painting done in 1896, when he was only fifteen years old. *Girl before a Mirror*, painted thirty-six years later, is clearly, therefore, not the work of an incompetent charlatan, but rather a work composed according to a different set of pictorial principles. The distortions of the female figure on the left are not evidence of lack of ability, but are the result of a conscious decision to depict the figure from more than one point of view at the same time—a decision which is completely consistent with a post-Einsteinian understanding that time and space are interdependent and that the reality of any object is that it has multiple identities which exist simultaneously. Similarly, the fact that the image in the mirror is not a literal reflection of the figure standing before it suggests that the visible, rational and conscious may represent only part of what is real and may even obscure the truth which lies beneath the surface of appearances. In short, Picasso abandoned linear perspective because it no longer seemed capable of providing a means to depict the truth.

To suggest that Picasso's *Girl before a Mirror* reflects a twentieth-century conception of reality which has been influenced by the findings of Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud and a host of other contemporary thinkers is not to say that Picasso was trying to paint in terms of their ideas. Rather, it is to support my contention that when man changes his conception of reality then art will change as well. Significant changes in style such as those which resulted from the adoption of linear perspective in the fifteenth century and its abandonment in the twentieth century are not arbitrary or accidental. Such changes are a reflection of a changed conception of reality and can best be understood in terms of the prevailing beliefs of the time and place in which works of art have been created.
Figure 7. Pablo Picasso, *First Communion*, 1896
I began this essay by suggesting that the study of art history, like that of philosophy, is a study of ideas and values. Great works of art cannot be separated from their cultural and historical contexts and are, in fact, an expression of the same ideas and values by which those contexts are determined. To divorce a work of art from its own time, and to attempt to see it only with one's own eyes and in terms of one's own experience is to rob that work of much of its meaning. To view a medieval manuscript or a Renaissance fresco without taking into account the beliefs which determined the world view of the artists who created them is to assure that such works will never be fully understood or appreciated. Yet, if it is true that a work of art may be better comprehended by an understanding of the context in which it was created, it is also true that works of art can tell us as much about the times in which they were created as those times can tell us about them. Not only a reflection of the spirit of the age, art is also an important determinant of that spirit. A civilization defines itself by its art as well as by its words and actions, and if we are truly to understand the spirit of any age, we must be conversant with the forms as well as with the contents of its ideas and values. I remember a wise professor who once said, "show me your painting, your sculpture, and your architecture and I will understand your conception of the world." What he meant by that, I think, is that art has to do with beliefs about truth and about what is real. Pablo Picasso—arguably the most important painter of the twentieth century—put it somewhat differently when he said that "art is a lie which tells us the truth," but his statement is evidence of a similar conviction that art is far more than just an arbitrary expression of self. Art is, in essence, a language—a unique visual language through which man is capable of communicating his deepest beliefs. Like the philosopher, the artist is a seeker of truth, and although he speaks to us in a language which is nonverbal, his message often provides profound revelations of what is real and what is true.

It is, in part, the role of the art historian to interpret and teach the language of art—to help the student master the grammar and syntax of painting, sculpture and architecture and, in so doing, to acquire the ability to "listen" to what the artist has to say. The development of such visual literacy leads to much pleasure and enjoyment. As I have tried to argue from the beginning of this essay, however, there is a greater purpose to art history upon which the discipline stakes its claim to a valid place within the liberal arts curriculum. That purpose, I believe, is to share in the philosopher's search for truth and in the never-ending inquiry into the nature of reality. It is through such search and inquiry that we not only come to understand the past, but ultimately and more importantly, that we come to know ourselves.
Notes

1 Emile Male, *The Gothic Image* (New York, 1958), p. 22. Although it deals primarily with the religious art of the thirteenth century, Male's book gives valuable insights into early medieval aesthetics and should be considered a basic text for the understanding of medieval symbolism.

2 The term "Hiberno-Saxon" is used to describe early medieval art which displays the stylistic characteristics of both the Irish (Hibernians) and the English (Anglo-Saxons). Although some of the most famous of the monastic scriptoria were located in English Northumbria—Jarrow, Wearmouth and Lindisfarne—the work produced there shows clear evidence of familiarity with the Irish manner of manuscript illumination.

3 The work closest in style to the Gospels of St. Willibrord is the Book of Durrow which was produced about the year 680. For the evidence that both works (now in the Bibliotheque Nationale) may have been produced at Lindisfarne, see George Henderson, *Early Medieval* (Baltimore, 1972). Probably it is pointless to make too much of whether a specific work was produced in Ireland or England for as medievalist Carl Nordenfalk says, "The Gospels of St. Willibrord and the Book of Lindisfarne, the most perfect of all the Hiberno-Saxon manuscripts, embody, together with the Books of Durrow and Kells, a national style common to Ireland and Northumbria." See Carl Nordenfalk, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Painting* (New York, 1977), p. 10.

4 Although produced in Christian monasteries, the paintings of the illuminated manuscripts are heavily influenced by the pagan designs of earlier Celtic, Pictish, and Anglo-Saxon art. This is not to say that the designs themselves are pagan, but rather that the world view of the artist-monks was conditioned by a heritage of pre-Christian belief and imagery.

5 There is considerable evidence that a form of linear perspective was known and used in the ancient world. Roman wall paintings, for example, show a clear understanding of some of the principles later articulated by Brunelleschi. Brunelleschi's role in the introduction of linear perspective to the Italian Renaissance was first attested to by the architect Filarete writing in the early 1460s and later confirmed and amplified upon by his biographer, Antonio Manetti, in the 1480s. For a good discussion of these points see Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York, 1975).


7 St. Francis' beliefs about the relationship between God and the natural world are best expressed in his "Canticle of the Sun," written about 1225.