

Michael Camille

## Art, Science and Philosophy at the Medieval University



I was born in 1958 in Keighley, West Yorkshire (UK) and studied English and Art History at Cambridge (B. A. 1980), receiving my Ph. D. in Art History in 1985. From 1983-85 I was a Research Fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge. In 1986 I became an Assistant professor at the University of Chicago and became a full Professor in the Department of the History of Art, while at the Wissenschaftskolleg, in May 1993. I have lectured and taught in a number of American and European Universities and was a visiting *Directeur d'Etudes* at the *Ecole des Hautes Etudes*, Paris in 1991. My areas of interest include: medieval art and architecture, especially illuminated manuscripts, the history of the book and theories of visual communication. Publications: *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-making in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge 1989) and *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art* (London and Cambridge MA, 1992). - Address: University of Chicago, Department of History of Art, 5540 South Greenwood Avenue, Chicago IL 60637, USA.

Considering the vast amount of time I have spent in Berlin's wondrous museums staring at many thousands of objects, peering at countless paintings and always making the art historians excuse that looking is actually a form of working — I am amazed that I have managed to write anything at all this year, let alone draft two quite hefty books. The first chapter of my major project is entitled "Making Images in the City of Words" and although it purportedly describes the situation in thirteenth-century Paris, I think it might also describe Berlin — except in reverse, for here I was making words on the edge of a city full of images. Berlin is brimming with magnificent monuments and memories of monuments, memorials, gardens and forests and streets containing images of all kinds, from squatter's art and graffiti to the sculpted statue population of Potsdam, all of which now has had an influence on my work over the course of the year.

I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg with plans to embark on a major new research project on the role played by images in the manuscripts used and

read at the medieval university. Due to the unflagging support of the magnificent library staff, I have been able to consult most of the published historical sources and literature for this project. As well as finding fascinating medieval scientific manuscripts in both halves of the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, I also travelled to what is left of the medieval university library at Erfurt, to examine their little-known collection of illuminated manuscripts at first hand. Most of the evidence for my study is provided by nearly seventy thirteenth and fourteenth century illuminated manuscripts of Aristotle's works that were produced at the universities of Paris and Oxford for masters and students in the Faculty of Arts. These reveal an attempt to put across new ideas about language, nature and the cosmos in pictorial terms. Crucial to the Aristotelian revolution of this period, I shall argue, was an increase in the prestige of images as models of knowledge. *Illumination Philosophy: Art and Science at the Medieval University* will comprise three large chapters. The first examines the illustration of the traditional seven liberal arts as they were still taught at Paris in one magnificent manuscript made for the Chancellor of University around 1310 including Aristotelian logic and the newly translated astronomical texts of Ptolemy. The second chapter will deal with the illustration of more controversial new texts of Aristotelian natural science, notably the *Physics* and the so-called *Parva Naturalia*. Finally the third chapter will deal with how Aristotle's *Metaphysics* was put into visual terms by illuminators. I have substantially completed the first chapter of this project and in the Tuesday Colloquium presented a paper on Aristotle's *Physics* which is the major part of the second. Another section of this chapter, on the role played by optics and the sense of sight in medieval epistemology was delivered at the Berlin Academy of Sciences at the invitation of Lorenz Krüger. Thanks to him and to the advice of Michael Baxandall who also presented a paper in the afternoon session of the same event, I was able to first put into words some of the most difficult issues I have been struggling to understand, concerning medieval theories of sensation and intellection and the relationship between medieval visual theories and actual visual practices.

Starting this ambitious study has also benefited from the stimulation of the "Visuality Group" which spontaneously formed and haphazardly met at the Kolleg. Here I also learned a great deal from the historian/philosopher of science, James Griesemer, as well as from my inspirational colleagues in Art History Svetlana Alpers and Michael Baxandall and Ernő Marosi. I never felt during the year in Berlin, as I sometimes do in my great, if logocentric home institution, that my position as someone interested in "images" made me a second-class intellectual citizen. Indeed, the image seemed to be a very powerful instrument in the Kolleg this partic-

ular year, to judge by how often overhead and slide projection facilities were utilized in the Tuesday Colloquia and how many marvellous photographs of our carnivalesque transgressions and summer revels were taken by Fellows and their families and displayed in the entrance hall.

During this year, I have also managed to finish a second shorter book manuscript, *Master of Death: The Life in Art of Pierre Remiet, Illuminator*. I have been gathering material for this project for some years and I had already completed much of the research before I arrived in Berlin. But perhaps it was something about the intensity of this magical ruined and then resurrected city which I came to love, that stimulated me to complete this dark and for me, very personal work. Having the psychological space in which to contemplate the subject of death in depth and being able to balance this morbidity against the life and energy of new friends made in the Kolleg, I was able to experiment with radical new ways of writing Art History. Looking at the life of one minor Parisian illuminator in the late fourteenth century and his obsession with rotting corpses and scenes of sadistic death, this book blurs the lines between narration/fiction and documentary history and returns to the individual as the focus of the history of image-making. Ironically Remiet was not what we think of today as an original artist but spent his whole career copying the work of others, but this makes his corpses and other conventions all the more fascinating. This "little history of death", written as a morbid antidote to those vaster modernist schemes of Ariès and Huizinga, presents the Late Medieval notion of death through more postmodern eyes.

One regret of the year is that I did not persevere more with German. After an intense and fruitful start, when, aided by the ever-resourceful teaching of Eva Hund, I felt I was at last grasping those terrible verbs, other priorities clogged up my schedule. However, I still consider it as one of the most important achievements of my time here that my previous meagre reading knowledge became somewhat more of a living language, allowing me to take in even more of the culture of a city that I know I shall return to again and again and also to feel more integrated into the vibrant and generous life of the remarkable institution.