



ANIMATION IN MEDIEVAL ART BISSERA V. PENTCHEVA

Bissera V. Pentcheva is a Full Professor of Art History at Stanford University. She has published three books with Pennsylvania State University Press – *Icons and Power: The Mother of God in Byzantium* (2006, recipient of the Nicholas Brown Prize of the Medieval Academy of America, 2010), *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium* (2010), and *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium* (2017, recipient of the 2018 American Academy of Religion prize in historical studies) – and has edited the volume *Aural Architecture* (2017). Her recent work has switched to an exploration of Western medieval art and its interaction with the Byzantine and Islamic traditions. Her methodology is informed by phenomenology, placing attention on the changing appearance of objects and architectural spaces and thus engaging with the intangible and elusive – the *Stimmung* or atmosphere/mood – surrounding the art. This recognition of the temporal aspect of the liveliness of the medieval image and architectural space has led Pentcheva to turn to film and produce documentary films. She has also integrated digital technology, more precisely auralizations that imprint the acoustic signature of a targeted space, on the recorded and live sound of medieval chant. – Address: Department of Art and Art History, Stanford University, McMurtry Art Building, 355 Roth Way, Stanford, CA 94305, USA. E-mail: bissera@stanford.edu.

Berlin is not a medieval city, so I could not breathe the inspiration of the pre-modern here. But it is a city so full of another and more recent history: WWII and the Cold War. Everywhere I turned, I had to confront these signs of death and human suffering. I would never forget biking down Heerstraße under the steel-gray skies and recognizing how this

avenue is made for tanks and how along one side of the street there was the endless cemetery Friedhof Heerstraße, so enormous that it felt like an eternity embracing the dead. I was already working on a topic on the resurrected bodies of the saints, and somehow Berlin with its scars of death and violence felt like the appropriate place to conduct this research.

Western medieval art is a new field for me. At Wiko I was able to read comprehensively and establish a strong foundation for this new work. I developed two research topics, a) the golden retablo at Stavelot and monastic reform in the twelfth century and b) Conques and its golden statues in interaction with the liturgy, music, and vernacular poetry. In addition, I completed another chapter for this same project, which will appear as an article in the peer-reviewed journal *Speculum*. During my stay at Wiko, I continued my work on filming and editing three short documentaries that illustrate the temporal aspect of medieval art and will accompany the book. I shared this work-in-progress with my Co-Fellows and the staff at Wiko in June and truly enjoyed their insightful feedback.

The stay at Wiko also allowed me to finish an edited volume *Voice, Imagination and Architecture in Medieval Art*, for which I wrote the introduction and two chapters on both the music and the acoustics of Hagia Sophia. The book includes nine essays by leading scholars in the field.

Berlin was my hub from which I could hop on a plane and engage directly with the monuments and the specialists studying them. Thus, a workshop on Sacred Sound at the Universität Tübingen gave me a chance to discuss ideas I was developing in my research about the architectural layout of chant as recorded in the inscription of liturgical images. A symposium in Paris on medieval modern allowed me to develop further how medieval art with its concepts of embodiment, seriality, and temporality resonates with current art practices, such as installation and systems art. It was a pleasure to discover and engage deeper with the publications of Alexander Nagel, who was a Fellow at Wiko when he wrote his *Medieval Modern* book. A workshop on sacred space – a major topic in my research – at the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome offered a stimulating forum to exchange ideas and receive feedback.

With time, I recognized that the artistic and cultural life of Berlin was a steady source of inspiration: the strong opera and classical music scene; the provocative and powerful theater, especially the shows at the Schaubühne; and the exhibitions at the Gemäldegalerie, Kunstgewerbemuseum, Museumsinsel, and Hamburger Bahnhof. I see in the same light the future exhibitions that will be organized and put on display at the Humboldt Forum. It was a pleasure and inspiration to participate in the seminar organized by

Wiko and Humboldt University about the Humboldt Forum. The inspiration I received while at Wiko in Berlin will continue to sustain my work for the years to come. Thank you for the stimulating environment.