



Painting the Hortus deliciarum: Medieval Women, Wisdom, and Time

By Danielle B. Joyner

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Between 1170 and 1190 in Alsace, Abbess Herrad compiled for her canonesses an elaborate manuscript, the *Hortus deliciarum*, which combined resplendent images with quotations from more than fifty texts to portray a history of the Christian church across time and through eternity. Destroyed in a bombing during the 1870 siege of Strasbourg, Herrad's lavishly illuminated manuscript was one of the earliest works created by a woman expressly for other women, the nuns training at the Hohenbourg abbey.

In this close study of the art and history of the *Hortus deliciarum*, Danielle Joyner shows how the book reflected twelfth-century concerns, such as emphasizing a historical interpretation of the Bible and reconciling scientific and theological accounts of the cosmos. She analyzes the images, texts, ideas, and processes at work in the manuscript and offers insights into how it configured a history of the Church in the temporal world as a guide to achieving eternal salvation.

By tracing the flexibility and efficacy of the multiple visions employed in the manuscript, Joyner explores how the *Hortus deliciarum* crafted a deeper understanding of the integral role of time in medieval constructions of history, the cosmos, and humanity's place within them. Scholars and students of art history, medieval and early modern studies, religion, gender, and the history of the book will find Joyner's work especially valuable, compelling, and provoking.

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Editorial Review

Review

“*Painting the ‘Hortus deliciarum’* breaks new ground by addressing the central role of time—historical, cosmological, exegetical, and liturgical—in Herrad’s vision. Joyner brings to her art-historical analysis an exceptional grasp of both the intricate technicalities and the rich moral, ascetic, and theological resonances of time and time-reckoning for the Middle Ages. Her portrait of Herrad reveals a creative ‘visual theologian’ who is also deeply rooted in the learned traditions of her age.”

—Faith Wallis, McGill University

“Expanding positivist scholarship, Danielle Joyner considers the *Hortus deliciarum*’s function and the intellectual currents that generated its illustrations. Sensitive to slippages in the copying of pictorial, scientific, and textual sources, she argues that Herrad not only compiled an encyclopedia of traditional knowledge but also taught her community ways to seek new information from it and to formulate original ideas.”

—Herbert L. Kessler, Johns Hopkins University

“*Painting the ‘Hortus deliciarum’* is an erudite, probing exploration of the sophisticated ways in which monastic authors and artists took up the challenge of visualizing a plural conception of time in the high Middle Ages. In Joyner’s lucid and compelling account, we rediscover the important role played by images for female monastics’ understandings of the rich interplay between calendar and cosmos. Sensitive to the imbrication of tradition and innovation in the images she treats, Joyner gives us an important new perspective into the vision of ‘divine wisdom at work in the world’ cultivated by women religious in the Middle Ages”

—Aden Kumler, University of Chicago

“In order to identify what is distinctive about the *Hortus*, the author looks at the textual sources used, the twelfth-century monastic context, and comparable compendia with shared concepts. Also of interest to students of the history of science, the book pays serious attention to cosmological diagrams and computus tables for tabulating the dates of movable feasts, arguing that these tables are themselves a form of exegesis and essential elements in the overall educational message of the work and its biblical history and concern with moral struggle against vice. . . . Written in an engaging and accessible style, the book is copiously illustrated and well documented, and it has a lengthy bibliography.”

—J. Oliver, *Choice*

“*Painting the Hortus deliciarum* reassesses the visual mechanics of the HD, expands our understanding of twelfth-century women's education, and rethinks the structure and dynamics of time as it was understood in the middle ages.”

—Megan McNamee, *The Medieval Review*

About the Author

Danielle Joyner is Visiting Assistant Professor of Art History in the Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University.

Users Review

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