

JANE BOYD - PHILIP F. ESLER

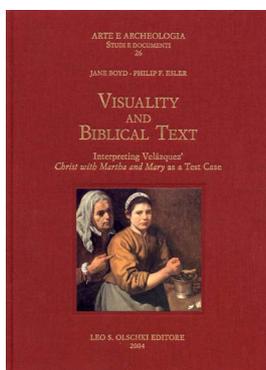
## VISUALITY AND BIBLICAL TEXT

### INTERPRETING VELÁZQUEZ' CHRIST WITH MARTHA AND MARY AS A TEST CASE

How do we interpret a painting that concerns a biblical text? What are the critical issues entailed in 'seeing' such a painting, with its unique blend of the visual and the textual? These are now urgent questions among art historians, biblical critics and artists. In *Visuality and Biblical Text: Interpreting Velázquez' Christ with Martha and Mary as a Test Case*, the artist Jane Boyd and biblical critic Philip Esler provide an entirely fresh set of answers. By uniquely pooling their respective areas of expertise, Boyd and Esler develop in relation to this challenging work a new methodology that is readily applicable to other paintings on biblical themes. The core of their approach is to fix upon the three contexts relevant to interpretation, that of the ancient biblical text, the artist's environment (in this case, early seventeenth century Seville) and today's viewer. This focus brings out persist-

ent if varying social patterns linking gender and space with honour and shame. They integrate with this a close consideration of

compositional development and painting processes demonstrated by the artist in this work. Boyd and Esler situate Velázquez' *Christ with Martha and Mary* in relation to other major paintings concerning Christ's visit to Martha and Mary from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onward, to Renaissance understandings of optics and perspective, and to the Tridentine Decree on sacred imagery. They



also make an entirely new proposal for how Velázquez adapted the composition of his studio in order to make this painting. Their solution explains both the enigmatic fact that Jesus is raising his left hand in breach of Spanish custom and the hauntingly disconsolate expression on the face of the young woman in the foreground.

*Come interpretare i dipinti riguardanti testi biblici? In questo libro l'artista Jane Boyd e il critico biblico Philip Esler offrono una serie di innovative risposte a questa domanda. Un nuovo approccio metodologico permette di interpretare quei dipinti, integrando i tre contesti critici (lo spunto biblico, l'ambiente dell'artista e il punto di vista attuale), la pertinente tradizione pittorica e la più stretta attenzione alla tecnica usata dall'artista per il dipinto. Viene anche svelata la tecnica segreta nascosta nella composizione di questa particolarmente impegnativa opera di Velázquez.*

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