

Books *Reviews*

A thousand years of shining glass

By Joan Barclay Lloyd

Liz James's book opens with a description of the 12th-century apse mosaic of San Clemente in Rome, illustrated by a brilliant colour plate. There are many such evocations of the visual splendour of individual mosaics in this volume. One has the impression that the author has taken the trouble to make a detailed visual analysis of each of them. These presentations and the numerous colour illustrations make this a lovely book. The text is also well argued and based on up-to-date scholarship.

In a text that is well argued and based on up-to-date scholarship, James introduces us to many mosaics in Western Europe and the Byzantine Empire. To mention only a few, there are the mosaics in the fifth-century baptistery at Albenga in North Italy with the chi-rho symbol of Christ, surrounded by 12 white doves that signify the apostles. In the apse of Panagia Angeloktisti in Kiti, Cyprus, the Mother of God wears robes made of costly red and blue tesserae, and attendant angels hold transparent globes. Images of Christ, the Mother of God, saints and scenes from the life of Christ decorate the 11th-century churches of Hosios Loukas, Nea Moni and Daphni in Greece. In Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, mosaics survive of the Adoration of Christ in the narthex, the Mother of God and the Christ Child enthroned in the apse, angels, emperors and their wives, and the



Liz James
Mosaics in the Medieval World: From Late Antiquity to the Fifteenth Century
Cambridge University Press,
625pp, £135 (hb)

great Deesis. In Italy, there are numerous beautiful mosaics in Ravenna, Torcello, Venice and Norman Sicily, as well as in Rome. Further afield, one finds the 12th-century decoration of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, and the 14th-century mosaics of the Pammakaristos Church (Fethiye Camii) and the Chora Church (Kariye Camii) in Istanbul. Particularly welcome are the discussions of mosaics in somewhat inaccessible places, like those of the Great Mosque in Damascus (early eighth century); the church of St Sophia in Kiev (11th century); or the church of the Virgin in Gelati (Kutaisi) in Georgia (12th century).

The first part of the book thoroughly investigates technical matters, such as the manufacture of glass

tesserae, the setting out and crafting of mosaics, the costs involved, and the logistics of bringing skilled workers to the buildings. The mosaics, which are on walls rather than on floors, often have backgrounds made of gold tesserae, which consist of gold leaf contained within small glass cubes. Less often, one finds silver tesserae. Artists also employed other materials, such as marble, mother of pearl, small pieces of pottery, or even painted stone cubes. Once suitable scaffolding had been erected, the tesserae were laid flat or pitched at an angle to reflect the light. Skilled artists had to consider how the finished images would look from a distance, particularly if a mosaic covered a curved surface, like a dome or a vault. Apart from the costs involved, mosaics were valued for their "gleaming beauty"; often the aim was to signify the glory of God since most late antique and medieval mosaics were located in religious buildings. Only occasionally have some survived from private palaces.

The second part discusses mosaics century by century from many different places, mostly around

Not Byzantine sources alone: the mosaics of Cefalù cathedral in Sicily (1131-48) combine Italian and Byzantine traditions in iconography, materials and inscriptions in Latin and Greek

the Mediterranean, but also at Germigny-des-Prés, Aachen and Prague. Each chapter provides statistics and maps to illustrate their distribution. Often chapters discuss mosaics made in the same century in the Latin West, in the Greek East and in the Levant. They decorate churches, baptisteries and tombs, as well as a few mosques. The discussion goes from the fourth to the 15th century, ranging over more than 1,000 years. Vibrant and sometimes controversial arguments explain the historical context in which the mosaics were made.

In such a broad overview, it is not surprising – although regrettable – that there are a few errors, such as describing two scenes – of Melchizedek offering bread and wine and Abraham with three angels – facing each other across the fifth-century nave of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, when they are in fact both on the same side of the church. Another puzzle is why the fragmentary Adoration of the Magi from Pope John VII's oratory from Old St Peter's is said to be in Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome in the captions, whereas in the text it is located correctly at Santa Maria in Cosmedin.

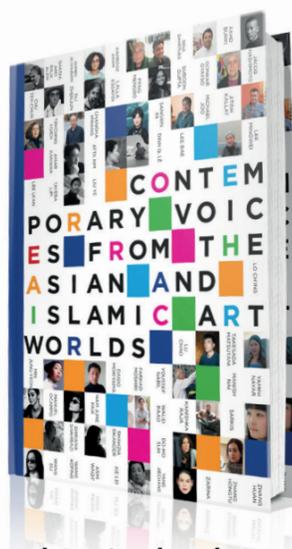
James puts forward a new view of the artists who made the most beautiful mosaics. Traditionally, all the most skilled masters were believed to have come from Constantinople. James questions this hypothesis by pointing to the magnificent mosaics of Italy, and especially Rome, where she claims there was a local tradition that was just as good as that in Byzantium.

This book should interest those who want to know about the making of mosaics, their meaning and the context in which they were executed.

Joan Barclay Lloyd studied at the Warburg Institute in London and taught art history at La Trobe University in Melbourne

Olivia Sand **CONTEMPORARY VOICES**

From the Asian and Islamic Art Worlds



The first comprehensive book to cover the Asian and Islamic contemporary art scenes featuring more than 80 interviews and 250 color illustrations

Available for purchase at bookstores and on skira.net



The most powerful figure in the British art world

Caroline Hancock, ed
Joanna Drew and the Art of Exhibitions
Skira, 192pp, £35, €40 (pb)

Joanna Drew (1929-2003) was a modern heroine. This book celebrates her achievement at the centre of the visual arts in Britain for over half a century. In addition to the illuminating biographical chapters by Caroline Hancock, there are contributions from titans of the British art scene: a galaxy including Alan Bowness, Bridget Riley, Nicholas Serota, Roy Strong and Richard Wentworth. The value of the book is two-fold: a portrait of a remarkable talent in the art of exhibition-making and also a portrait of a period when provision for the arts (in the form of the Arts Council of Great Britain) was established as a cultural equivalent to the National Health Service. Drew's career spanned the efflorescence of the Arts Council and its unfortunate and inept erosion at the hands of Thatcherite dogma in the later decades of the 20th century.

Drew was the daughter of a brigadier father and a talented painter mother. She was educated at Dartington and then took the combined course in fine art offered by the University of Edinburgh (art history) and Edinburgh College of Art (studio art). While there she co-organised two important exhibitions. She joined the Arts Council at the age of 22 in 1952 and served as exhibition assistant, exhibition organiser, assistant director for exhibitions, director of exhibitions and as director of art until, in 1987, she became the first director of the Hayward Gallery, by then part of London's South Bank Centre. Serota writes that, for nearly 25 years, Drew "was the most powerful figure in the British art world, far more influential than the directors of the Tate or the National Gallery". The Arts Council not only funded galleries, exhibitions and artists, it had its own exhibitions programme and its own collection of contemporary art.

If anyone had told Drew that she was a great role model, I think she would have felt rather ill. This book shows how remarkably free of

ego she was, how unassuming, how supportive of colleagues, how she led through consensus and through uncommon amounts of common sense. She was herself an exhibition maker of imagination, boldness and finesse. The hanging of pictures and the placement of sculptures became, in the hands of Drew and her colleagues, a minor but essential art form in its own right. This book brings to life many of the great exhibitions produced by Drew and her colleagues, such as the Picasso exhibition she organised with Roland Penrose at the Tate in 1960. (One of the many gems in the book is Drew's account of visiting Picasso to return work after another landmark exhibition in 1968.) The book also celebrates the architectural merits and various transformations of the Hayward Gallery, the often controversial Brutalist building that I loved from first setting foot in it to see its first show – Henri Matisse, in 1968. The lively essays contain such extraordinary tales as the plan by a chair of the Arts Council – William Rees-Mogg – to give the Hayward to the British Film Institute (a move stopped by Strong as chair of the Arts Council's art panel). This book lives up, wonderfully, to its remarkable subject.

Mark Haworth-Booth

The author is an honorary research fellow at the Victoria and Albert Museum. He has contributed essays recently to *The Importance of Everywhere: Philip Larkin's Photographs*; *Curtis Moffat: Silver Society*; and *Fifty Years of Great Art Writing*