

9-2018

Review: Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment

Jillian M. Ewalt

University of Dayton, jewalt1@udayton.edu

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Jillian M. Ewalt (0000-0003-0805-3097) (2018). Review: Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment. *Art Libraries Society of North America Reviews (ARLIS/NA Reviews)*.
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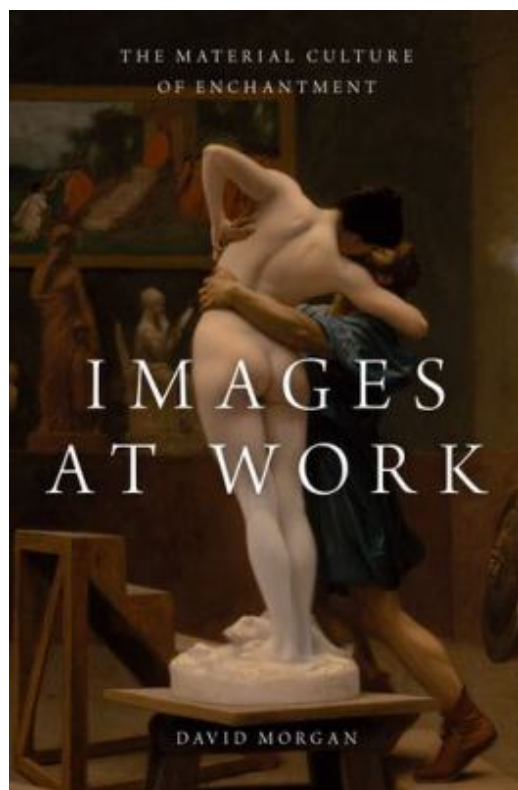
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Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment

by David Morgan. Oxford University Press, February 2018. 224 p., ill. ISBN: 9780190272111 (h/c), \$34.95.

Reviewed September 2018

Jillian Ewalt, Librarian, University of Dayton, jewalt1@udayton.edu



Many of us have experienced the feeling of being awe-inspired, charmed, or spellbound by an image. Perhaps we have heard of images used as apotropaic devices (like *hamsa*) or images that have precipitated a religious conversion experience (like an apparition of the Blessed Virgin Mary). In *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment*, David Morgan offers a framework for understanding how images function as agents and the affective relationship between human experience and visual culture. Morgan presents his topic using a multidisciplinary approach that is equal parts philosophy, sociology, and anthropology, grounded in visual studies. *Images at Work* is a natural extension of Morgan's oeuvre; in this volume, he effectively challenges the reader to consider the capacity of images to act independently of human will and how they operate within networks of meaning.

In the space of six chapters, Morgan materializes the definition and structure of enchantment. He begins by centering belief and make-believe as important aspects of enchantment and visual culture. He then introduces Actor-network theory in order to provide a framework for how images operate as "focal objects" that are accessed and activated by webs of human and non-human actors. Morgan moves into disenchantment and the politics of enchantment using examples from iconoclasm and the destruction of cultural and religious objects. Next, he turns to the ecology of images and offers a broad range of examples, from the St. Foy reliquary to an info-graphic for the organic cotton value chain, to expand on how images operate within networks. In the chapter on icons and aura, Morgan discusses how both religious and cultural icons are important players in the work of enchantment. In the last chapter, he introduces the role of chance, randomness, fortune, and fate as they relate to the utility of images. Carefully selected examples like *Pygmalion* and *Galatea*, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and the *Wizard of Oz*, among many others, help the reader keep pace with Morgan's "visual mechanics" of enchantment.

Fifty-five high quality images, including twenty in color, provide critical visual evidence for Morgan's argument. A select bibliography and index are also included.

This book will be of interest to academic libraries and scholars in visual studies, art, and art history. Even though Morgan does not explicitly address enchantment as it relates to digital images, much of the content is also relevant to digital visual literacy. At its core, this book is really about the power of images. Morgan succeeds at demonstrating how enchantment exists as a fundamental and pervasive part of visual culture and the human experience

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