



Spectacular Miracles: Transforming Images in Italy, From the Renaissance to the Present

Jane Garnett

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Spectacular Miracles confronts an enduring Western belief in the supernatural power of images, for example the belief that a statue or painting of the Madonna can fly through the air, speak, weep or produce miraculous cures. Although discomfiting to widely-held assumptions, the cults of particular paintings and statues held to be miraculous have persisted beyond the middle ages into the present, even in a modern European city such as Genoa, the primary focus of this book.

Spectacular Miracles draws upon rich documentation from northwest Italy and elsewhere to show how, in a range of historical contexts, these images 'work'. Ritual animation of the image is vividly evoked, as is the phenomenology of the beholder's experience. The subversive potential of the miraculous image to bypass clerical and secular authority is a central theme. Reproducibility enhances this power: devotion is hard to control when a copy of a venerated image (even in a digital form mediated by the internet) is held to carry the same supernatural potential as the original.

Spectacular Miracles engages with the history, anthropology and visual culture of images and religion, and is a convincing study of the power of faith and art.

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