

Foreword

What is art? What does it accomplish? Why does it move us so? These are the questions posed by the Collaborative Research Center (CRC) 1391 in our examination of images, texts, objects, and musical works from Europe in the premodern era. We understand premodern Europe as a polycentric, regionally and temporally open field of cultural, social, and societal interactions, and we hope to present evidence of aesthetic self-awareness in the acts and artifacts in this field. We begin with the thesis that acts and artifacts from different times and cultures are not only embedded in the sociocultural spaces where they originate, but through the power of their artistry to a great degree help shape – and sometimes even themselves constitute – sociocultural processes. In order to show this, various disciplines within the CRC – from archeology to art history, musicology, classis, philology, linguistics, rhetoric, history, and theology – work together in a broadly interdisciplinary approach.

Each volume of the book series *Koordinaten* (*Coordinates*) will present important, historically differentiated force fields of discussion about premodern aesthetics. Gradually, a representative ‘network of coordinates’ of discourse on premodern aesthetics will emerge. Our intention is to produce neither a closed system nor a theory of premodern aesthetics. Instead, the concept of ‘coordinates’ highlights dynamic, open criteria and positions that were by no means discursively or practically determinate to the same extent for all times and places but were able to develop a highly productive power and influence within the interactive fields described above. Nor does the ensemble of coordinates under discussion aim for a mutually exclusive comparison of premodern and modern aesthetic criteria. Instead, we want to illustrate the extent to which two thousand years of European cultural history – precisely because during that time there was no functional separation between art and lived reality – can provide new impulses for an understanding of aesthetics even in the present day and recalibrate traditional ideas about the canon.

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