



LADY REASON AND THE WRITING OF HISTORY

Monika Leisch-Kiesl

Le livre de la cité des dames (The Book of the City of Ladies) by the French writer and philosopher Christine de Pizan (1364 – ca. 1430) is among the most widely-read texts of the early 15th century and is considered to be one of the first feminist works in European literature. As the fruit of a highly-educated author's broad range of reading, it reflects the intellectual and socio-political debates of its time, and the aesthetics of the book also demonstrate how Christine de Pizan took care to publish her verbal and visual compositions in a complex and self-assured form.

Multidisciplinary engagement with the many aspects of “Christine de Pizan” as a research topic continues today in an unbroken tradition. The art historian and philosopher Monika Leisch-Kiesl, an expert in both historical gender studies and book illumination, now convincingly succeeds in bringing observers and readers into the often-surprising intellectual world of a young female writer at the French court in the early Renaissance. She emphasises not least the still-powerful utopian potential of this poet who worked in early 15th-century Paris. Furthermore, Sibylle Ryser's exceptional and perfectly-matched design for this bilingual edition brings a gem of medieval book art into an enlightening dialogue with its scholarly analysis.

Monika Leisch-Kiesl:
Lady Reason and the Writing of History.
Christine de Pizan's “Livre de la Cité des dames”
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hard cover, half-linen binding
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Born in Venice in 1364, **Christine de Pizan** arrived in Paris at the age of four, at the court of King Charles V, where her father, Tommaso di Benvenuto da Pizzano, was an astronomer and physicist. She benefited from the intellectual and cultural climate of the Valois court and received an extensive education, not least from her father, who introduced her to the *artes liberales*. She had access to the royal library and participated in the vibrant political debates during this period of transition between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

She gained her first professional experience in the chancery of her husband, Étienne du Castel, who held a position as secretary and notary at the court. Widowed at the age of twenty-five and responsible for three children, Christine de Pizan decided to pursue a career as a writer. She employed scribes, supervised the illumination of her manuscripts and engaged some of the leading artists working in Paris. The exquisite pieces were to be found in the most prestigious libraries in Burgundy and beyond. Thanks to digitization, they are now accessible to a wide range of readers.

An art historian and philosopher, **Monika Leisch-Kiesl** has held a professorship for art history and aesthetics at the KU Private University in Linz since 1996 and laid the foundation for a Faculty of Philosophy and Art History there in 2005, which she chaired for ten years. Her research has taken her to the Ludwig Maximilian University and the State Library in Munich, the University of Basel and the Schaulager of the Laurenz Foundation, the Jagiellonian University and the Cricoteca in Krakow.

Monika Leisch-Kiesl creatively combines questions of gender studies with impulses of text-image research, approaches to contemporary artistic positions with a broad knowledge of art theory and aesthetics, insights in the field of drawing with problems of global art history. One focus of her recent publishing endeavors is to emphasize the intensity of intellectual debate by virtue of the quality of formal design. → www.leisch-kiesl.com

After an initial professional stint in editing at Diogenes in Zurich, **Sibylle Ryser** completed her graphic design training at the renowned Basel School of Design (now the FHNW Academy of Art and Design). She then worked in a design studio in Amsterdam and subsequently founded a communications agency in Basel with two colleagues in 1992. In 2005, she graduated with a master's degree in art history and popular cultures from the University of Zurich. Since 2001, Sibylle Ryser has been running her own office for book design in Basel. She works for museums, publishers and institutions in the fields of art and science. She understands her design concepts as visual organization of content. She loves footnotes, tolerant typographic grids, functional aesthetics and well-edited typefaces. → www.sibylleryser.ch