

### Natalie Kampen's "The Muted Other"

Natalie Kampen states that the goal of her essay "the Muted Other" is "to develop a gender-based interpretation of several works of classicizing public art and to show how they communicated ideas about social order through their representations of female sexuality" (15). By the term "classicizing art" Kampen means art which follows the classical style; that is art--particularly later European art--which uses Greek or Roman art or literature as a inspiration for its content and style. In this sense, Kampen's primary concern is not actually with Roman art, but rather with how its visual ideology lays a groundwork for eighteenth-century painters.

This focus points to what is perhaps the greatest weakness in Kampen's discussion of Roman art: since Roman art is primarily a context for later art, Kampen extends only minimal energy contextualizing the Ara Pacis and Basilica Aemilia friezes themselves. Kampen seems to acknowledge the need to support her discussion historically since she argues that the use of gender in the friezes reflects an "ideologically motivated program" which was "part of the Augustan response to the chaos of rapidly changing upper-class mores at the end of the Republic" (16). Yet, Kampen leaves many questions regarding the condition of women unanswered. For example, Kampen assumes that in Roman society men were the "self" and women were the "other" or the "outsider." This is a distinctly twentieth-century idea; although it is not intrinsically fallacious to use twentieth-century theories to investigate classical art, one does need to show that they are really applicable. While male Romans may have viewed men as the normative and women as aliens, Kampen never supports this key assumption. Indeed, Kampen ignores the rather damaging fact that Augustus' revival of the family also regulated *male* sexuality by discouraging bachelorhood and nonreproductive marriages (and thus, presumably, male homosexuality). Could one not argue then that Augustus' social programs equally "demonstrate the merits" of correct *male* behavior and reveal that "unregulated *male* conduct, proof of alterity, can endanger the whole of society"? One wonders what would happen if Kampen turned her gaze toward the male figures in art from the Augustan age.

In spite of these problems, Kampen's article provides a engaging model for feminist readings of Roman art and literature. Kampen reveals how art (and literature) can express and regulate the anxieties of an age. She also shows how myths can be staged and rearranged in order to send powerful messages about gender and normative behavior. I would be curious to know if members of the class felt that other works we have read support Kampen's theory that Roman art "demonstrates the...superiority of the male Self over the female Other" and tries to convince the "Other that it is possible to become like the Self" (15).