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copies such as the Beatus of Saint-Sever and the Silos Beatus. Best known here is his 1973 essay on “Pain and Death in the Beatus of Saint-Sever,” an 11th-century manuscript from southern France. Werckmeister refers here to illustrations of cosmic catastrophes, whose human victims do not passively endure the disaster, but resist and try to escape. Werckmeister relates these unusual motifs to a responsoory of the Office of the Dead describing cosmic catastrophes and the Last Judgment. He interprets the efforts of the victims of the horror scenes to escape the cosmic catastrophes as an indication that one could still escape final damnation by establishing a memorial for one’s own soul as well as by giving endowments to the Church.

Werckmeister has contributed important, pioneering research not only on early medieval book illumination, but also on Romanesque sculpture in France and Spain. His essay “The Emmaus and Thomas Pillar of the Cloister of Silos” (1990), for example, should be mentioned, in which he points out connections to the Easter liturgy and specifically the antiphony from Silos that explain the choice of subject and the design of the relief. Probably Werckmeister’s most fascinating and well-known study of the Romanesque period is his essay on the figure of the recumbent Eve on the lintel of the north portal of Autun Cathedral (1972). Until then, the unusual recumbent position of Eve had been explained by the narrow horizontal format of the lintel. Werckmeister, however, convincingly demonstrates that this position has a multiple meaning and found a striking parallel at that time in the similarly humiliating posture of notorious sinners at the rite of public penance on Ash Wednesday. Moreover, Eve, with her naked breasts sensually rendered, embodies the sexual concupiscientia that was often cited by theologians as the cause of the original sin, which is why with its regulations the Church interfered in the sexual lives of the faithful. The medieval viewer of the penitential Portal of Autun was thus manipulated and domesticated in several ways, in order to be more receptive to the moral teachings of the Church.

In 1984 Werckmeister became Mary Jane Crowe Distinguished Professor at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, a position he retained until his retirement in 2002. His most important works from this period include two books, one on the German-Swiss artist Paul Klee and another on the political confrontation of the arts in interwar Europe. In these later books and other publications Werckmeister’s historical-materialist, Marxist approach is more clearly manifest, since here he sees the arts even more directly determined by their social and economic conditions. This applies especially to Werckmeister’s book on Klee (The Making of Klee’s Career 1914-1920, 1989). In the German-speaking world, Klee is regarded as a sage aloof of all material things, but Werckmeister proves that he achieved his final artistic and commercial breakthrough only after adapting to the art market and to the artistic ideals of his patrons and friendly art critics.

Instead of writing a second book on Klee’s later periods, Werckmeister devoted himself to a much larger and more significant topic: the confrontation of the arts and the various political ideologies in the decade from the Great Depression of 1929 to the beginning of World War II in 1939 (The Political Confrontation of the Arts in Europe from the Great Depression to the Second World War, 2020). Here he not only compares—as others have done more often—the art and architecture of the three totalitarian states of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Soviet Union but he also contrasts them with the situation in the remaining democratic states, especially those under the Popular Front governments in France and Spain.

In addition to his strictly art historical works, Werckmeister has also published a number of volumes of essays on art and cultural criticism, which provide impressive evidence of the breadth and diversity of his interests and knowledge: Ende der Ästhetik. Essays über Adorno, Bloch, das gelbe Unterseeboot und der eindimensionale Mensch, 1971; Ideologie und Kunst und andere Essays, 1974; Zitatellenkultur, 1989 (Citadel Culture. The Beautiful Art of Decline in the Culture of the Eighties, 1991); Linke Ikonen, 1997 (Icons of the Left: Benjamin and Eisenstein, Picasso and Kafka after the Fall of Communism, 1999); Der Medusa-Effekt, 2001 (The Medusa Effect. Political Pictorial Strategies since September 11, 2005). This brief survey of Werckmeister’s essay volumes suggests that an art historian of similar brilliance, intellectual breadth, and political radicalism will not soon be found again.

Werckmeister was married to the Spanish literary historian and medievalist Eukene Lacarra Lanz (1944-2023) from 1965 to 1983. He is survived by three children and six grandchildren.