

Barbara Baert

**Afterlife Studies and the *Occasio Grisaille* in Mantua
(School of Mantegna, 1495-1510)**

This essay features a *grisaille* fresco depicting the *Kairos/Occasio* motif. A female figure with hair in front of her face and a bald crown moves with winged feet on top of a globe. Her clothing billows dynamically in the wind. She is a contrast to the woman with headgear, who has been placed on a rectangular pedestal and is keeping a young man from chasing the winged woman. He stretches out his arms to her in vain. The iconography of this *grisaille* crystallizes a *longue durée* of 'the right moment' or the fleeting opportunity. The *grisaille* illuminates a historical juncture in which the *Fortuna/Occasio* motif fascinated families of art patrons such as the Gonzagas, Sforzas and Estes. The grasping of the moment in the fresco also allows us to begin to grasp what 'the unique opportunity' meant for the people in the 15th century. Furthermore, the iconography of the *grisaille* has a key position in the transition from Middle Ages to Renaissance. This transition coincided with an iconographic conflation of *Kairos* and *Occasio*. The hybrid forms arose with the new, humanist understanding of human destiny. Likewise, the Mantuan *grisaille* embodies a modern depiction of this conflation in relation to the course of man's life and their responsibilities to society. The fresco literally possesses the energy of a kairotic juncture, and enables a better understanding of 15th-century humanism through the lens of what the virtue-mediated relationship between human being and fate makes possible.