



Shaping Viewer Experience through Images of Unfinished Work: A Visual History of Making in the fourth to eighth-century CE Eastern Mediterranean

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Introduction[1]

What is being attacked...is the rationalistic notion that art is a form of work that results in a finished product....[Art] is mutable stuff which need not arrive at the point of being finalized with respect to either time or space. The notion that work is an irreversible process ending in a static icon-object no longer has much relevance.

Robert Morris, 1969[2]

At the core of this investigation are representations in works of art of unfinished, reversible processes.[3] Images of labor and laborers were uncommon in classical antiquity,[4] but the early medieval period in particular offers a handful of varied depictions highlighting unfinished work as the primary objective (Fig. 1 and