In 2007 Aleksandra Lipińska authored Wewnętrzne światło: Południowoniderlandzka rzeźba alabastrowa w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej (Inner light: Southern Netherlandish alabaster sculpture in Central and Eastern Europe). This impressive study was the subject of her dissertation at the University of Wrocław. I had the pleasure of reviewing this book for Renaissance Quarterly (62.2 [2009]: 544–46). The author expressed the hope to have her book someday translated into English. This wish is now fulfilled in a wonderful new and rather different edition. The new title makes two significant changes. Rather than Inner Light, which alludes to the luminous nature of the material, Lipińska, who is a professor at the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich, now uses Moving Sculptures. This stresses the mobility of many alabasters from their place of production in Mechelen or Antwerp to new homes across the Continent. Lipińska also broadens the geographic framework from Central and Eastern Europe to Central and Northern Europe. As explained in her introduction, the first book resulted in the discovery and/or reattribution of many Netherlandish alabasters outside of the Low Countries. This allows her to test her earlier findings in a broader geographic context. The new edition omits the original catalogue of ninety-three alabasters. The photographs, while slightly fewer, are now integrated throughout the book.

Although much of the text is the same, Lipińska has refocused the book into just two parts: “At the Source” and “At the Destination.” She is intrigued by issues of cultural transfer, specifically how alabasters made in the Low Countries were adopted and then adapted in other lands. The first half of the book examines the production of alabaster sculpture. Especially illuminating is Lipińska’s initial chapter on alabaster as a material. She addresses alabaster’s physical characteristics, the sources where it was quarried, its use in comparison with marble and other stone, its carnality or flesh-like qualities, and its meaning through literary references from Pliny and the Bible to Shakespeare. Chapter 2
explores how several noted sculptors, such as Conrat Meit, Jean Mone, and Willem van
den Broecke, employed alabaster for small statuettes, tomb effigies, altar reliefs, and
paintings. The names of most alabaster cleynstekers, or carvers of small-scale works, are
unknown. Chapter 3 studies how alabaster workshops in Mechelen developed efficient
methods of serial production including the specialization of artisans and the repetition of
certain compositions based on print models (see figs. 95–96). Chapter 4 considers the
role of art markets, especially in Antwerp, in selling alabasters across Europe.

The second part of the book looks at the Netherlandish alabasters in their new
environments. The export of alabasters to Central and Eastern Europe picked up
dramatically after the Peace of Augsburg of 1555. Lipińska determined that the majority
of alabasters were acquired by Protestant rulers, court officials, and wealthy burghers. Yet
the choice of common biblical subjects appealed to Protestants and Catholics alike,
especially after the Council of Trent. The author delves into the transfer of the alabasters
beyond the Low Countries and their reorientation into new cultures. The last four
chapters consider how alabaster reliefs were incorporated into altarpieces, tombs, and
epitaphs, as well as displayed in Kunstkammers and other collections where sometimes
they covered entire rooms. In all of these settings the alabaster reliefs were provided with
often-elaborate decorative frames that accentuated their refinement.

Lipińska’s *Moving Sculptures* is beautifully researched, lucidly argued, and
wonderfully informative. It should appeal to any scholar interested in the history of
materials, the methods of artistic production, the rise of early modern art markets, and
the aesthetics of taste and reception. Lipińska includes a small selection of relevant letters
and other documents. Her superb English-language edition deserves a wide audience. I
also would recommend her extensive contributions to *Materia świata I ciał: Alabaster w
rzeźbie niderlandzkiej XVI–XVII wieku / Matter of Light and Flesh: Alabaster in the
Netherlandish Sculpture of the 16th and 17th Centuries*, the dual-language catalogue of an
exhibition at the National Museum in Gdańsk in late 2011 and early 2012.

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