

Mapping Spaces : Networks of Knowledge in 17th Century

Landscape Painting

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The two editors of this substantial volume, an off-shoot of what must have been a spectacular exhibition at ZKM (the Zentrum für Kunst und Medien, Karlsruhe), provide the excellent introductory and closing essays to contributions by thirty-seven authors, mainly from German and Dutch academic institutions. ZKM is known mainly for its work with media artists, transdisciplinary research and collaboration internationally, the exhibition and publication bringing into the light artefacts and reflections from a previous age of exploration at the beginnings of the Enlightenment. The space of the title is the application of intellect to describing and representing the dynamics of distance, and thought.

Eleven sections step through key areas of contemporary research, initially with contextual analysis of the descriptions of space in the historical record, from Plato to Descartes, Casarus to Bruno, Newton to Leibniz and Spinoza. The Netherlands of the 17th Century, the Golden Age, provided a kind of sanctuary to thinkers. This was a time and place when the governing conservatism of predominantly the Catholics (and the Jewish communities) was pushed aside, the Hundred Years War bringing to an end the Spanish / Hapsburg occupation of the Netherlands.

Then, as now, military objectives drove the development of technology mainly for effecting or defeating sieges, attracting a variety of talents that rapidly became the Professions; of engineer, architect, surveyor, painter, financier, astronomer, navigator, botanist, scholar (and the later emergence of the academic and the politician). Each of the authors covers

these developments interestingly, some engagingly, all working with a picture editor and designer to fully effect an amazing collection of images demonstrating the ascendancy of the visual artefact within the knowledge systems being shaped.

The globalisation of the times through the exploitation of new lands, the “commercial machines” of the new corporations (the VOC, the Dutch East Indies Company) in hand with the colonial and religious machines, produced a lucrative line for painters of topography, some used as diagrams of possession complete with strategic notation, alongside the local landscapes commissioned to be hung on the same walls of the newly wealthy entrepreneurs.

Pieter Snayers is referenced frequently. His battle paintings are mainly based on anecdote and function as 'painted reports'. Willem van der Velde, the maritime painter was differently “embedded” in military formations, capturing pen and ink snapshots of moments in engagements to embalm as whole paintings later. Kelchtermans deftly lays out the Snayers methodology: use whatever anyone had notated about a battle in word or image, synthesis into a pleasingly composed painting, with accurately researched detailing, (including innovatory 'folding perspectives'); and make sure to convey information about the martial exploits that predominantly dwell on the patron's military skill. An approach later refined by Hollywood, the enterprise was equally risky - one commissioning general never paid the painter's bill for his series, *The Siege of Breda*.

Fortification was the defence policy pursued by most of the town burghers, successfully bringing together the players in an emerging industry where huge profits could be made, publishing included. Illustrated treatises sold well and many fabulous engravings and drawings are included here displaying fortresses as geometric snowflake-like perfection (“the geometry of power”), the weapons of war becoming the 'theatre of machines'. Italian expertise from the previous centuries fed into perfecting the technology, even Albrecht Dürer contributing at arms length with an early treatise detailing a design that enabled fire to be directed to the enemy at the front of the city wall, or to its rear should population control become necessary! As sappers and military engineers succeeded where

direct force of arms failed, the killing grounds of inevitability bring us firmly into the contemporary era, where so much described here is familiar, where so little has changed.

Kassel, besides being the home of the contemporary art event *Dokumenta*, has one of the best collections of astronomical and mathematical instruments, many of which are referenced throughout the volume, including those used for the purposes of 'operational topography'. The peace following the wars in the Dutch provinces led to cartography, drainage, reclamation of land and the development of 'the first modern economy'. The bourgeois surpluses encouraged painters such as Ruisdael, discussed by several of the authors, including fascinating quantitative analysis of contemporary inventories by genre, mapping the shift in tastes and monetary value.

The many facets of the term 'mapping' have been described extensively recently in the literature. Artists' response to the term in Karen O'Rourke's survey, including situationist followers using an approach termed psychogeography, intended to eventually '...reveal the city's underlying structure' (reviewed in *LDR* January 2014); Tom Conley describing the social affect of map-making during the 15th Century in France (reviewed in *LDR* April 2012).

Hasty comparisons are occasionally drawn, the wide-angle camera lens 'bird's eye view' favoured by several authors as somehow being 'objective vision' rather than the construction it remains. Surely in a time of cathedral and church building the heightened and expansive isometric viewpoint was well known to artists as well as builders and architects?

The publication is voluminous, with a wealth of images gathered from the period designed to astound, many having emerged from distant archives probably known only to the authors. Colour printing is excellent and though the book is large (quarto), often the detail needed to be seen in the paintings of the period, has to be postponed until a visit can be made to the many lending institutions involved in the project. But as a substantial catalogue, though with no index, it has detailed footnotes and (miniscule) image captions, and a well-functioning cross-referencing system between contributors. Nonetheless there is needless repetition of the historical context by many of the expert commentaries, suggesting that the editors

anticipated each could stand alone as extracts. The physically weighty book will be an essential addition to undergraduate libraries designed to illustrate, through a fresh interpretation of the record, the provenance of barriers existing today between contemporary silos of knowledge.

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