

BOOK REVIEW

Warren, Maureen, ed. *Paper Knives, Paper Crowns: Political Prints in the Dutch Republic*

Champaign, IL: Krannert Art Museum, 2022. Pp. 182, 33 illustrations.

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This lushly illustrated volume derives from a temporary exhibition hosted by the Krannert Art Museum (KAM) at the University of Illinois. Maureen Warren, the editor of *Paper Knives Paper Crowns* and the curator responsible for organizing its corresponding museum exhibition, has assembled a remarkable array of scholars to direct their research toward the innovative and prolific topics highlighted by the collection at hand. Namely, the exhibition, *Fake News & Lying Pictures: Political Prints in the Dutch Republic*, highlights the KAM's extensive holdings of early modern Dutch prints to argue for a better accounting of their role in the early modern media ecosystem. Whereas traditional art historical narratives typically privilege the artistic accomplishment of fine art to the detriment of popular prints, Warren centers partisan propaganda, decorative maps, and crude satire to highlight the importance of such genres to their consumers, simultaneously encouraging scholars from various fields to treat so-called ephemeral media with due rigor.

Over the course of six essays, the contributors to this volume take turns applying their own academic specializations to the general theme of early modern Dutch political prints, with specific focus given to prints from the KAM's collection. For a collection of individual essays, the book has a surprisingly coherent thematic flow. The first short essay, by Ilja M. Veldman, provides a gracious overview of the historiography of Dutch political prints. Not only is this a necessity for the uninitiated reader but the essay effectively integrates many of the themes and characters explored in later sections.

The next essay, Warren's contribution to the collection, is the volume's conceptual powerhouse, definitively introducing Dutch political prints as worthy subjects of research, highlighting reasons for difficulty in doing so, and identifying compelling throughlines to the modern world's sometimes uncomfortable relationship with media. Warren points out that the purveyors of media in our modern "media-saturated and highly polarized culture . . . continue to serve many of the functions that early modern printmakers did: informing and entertaining with varying degrees of bias and stirring their audiences to deliberate, and then act" (53). Such persistent relevance lends increased importance to efforts to understand the influence that bias in media has on its consumers, whether they be contemporary or early modern. An important throughline for the book and media studies in general is an emphasis on how media influences through both its content and form.

Warren's essay is the collection's most far-reaching. The book's subsequent essays each pertain to a specific topic, individual, or category of popular print. Of particular interest for readers of this journal is the second contribution by Ilja M. Veldman that explores how the Dutch printmaker Crispijn de Passe (1594–1670) represented foreign affairs through satirical political broadsheets. Beginning in 1620, de Passe's broadsides offer a compelling perspective not only on what European events were seen as newsworthy from a Dutch perspective, but also of how early modern prints utilized allegory to incising effect, and, eventually, the effective boundaries printmakers had to heed. As long as the figures de Passe depicted as foul beasts remained limited to foreign combatants, the printmaker was free to practice his craft. Yet, as Veldman stresses, one misstep could lead to a life of penury. De Passe's case study underlines the conditionality of freedom for the early modern printmaker—producing early modern "fake news" was indeed a risky profession.

Meredith McNeil Hale's essay makes the sharpest historiographical assertion of the collection, probing the origins of political caricature and the genre's association with modernity. Leaning on the assertion by Ernst Gombrich and Ernst Kris that caricature's emphasis on the individual represents a clear indicator (if not instigator) of modernity, Hale convincingly questions why this narrative dismisses the work of the Dutch printmaker Romeyn de Hooghe (1645–1708). Even though this essay seeks to incorporate de Hooghe into the narrative of a caricature-based modernity, it aims well short of arguing that he fully practiced the genre. Instead, it provides important context to the development of the caricature mindset and points to a longer pre-history of caricature that should be thoroughly researched given the implications attributed to the genre.

Interspersed throughout the book's essays are thirty-three high-quality color reproductions of prints displayed as part of the museum's exhibition. The beauty of these images alone makes a compelling case for one to own the book. However, despite masquerading as a coffee table book, the volume's real value is in how well it integrates its stunningly beautiful historical images with scholarly research that situates them in their time and illuminates new perspectives on how they functioned and why they mattered.

Following a far-too-brief stay in the KAM, the exhibition will continue on to the University of San Diego and Smith College. By the time of this review's publication, the exhibition will have run its course, leaving *Paper Knives*, *Paper Crowns* behind as the next best option for those interested in the significance of early modern Dutch political prints. Yet, this book is more than simply an artifact of the exhibition. It engages with its topic with a clarity of prose that welcomes non-specialists and encourages them to appreciate the form and function of print, often helpfully displaying an image near its mention in an essay. At the same time, this book is essential reading for any scholar interested in early modern print culture. Despite the specificity of its geographic scope, its contributors effectively interweave wider contexts of early modern print culture into the text and detailed footnotes.