

Joan Coutu, *Persuasion and Propaganda: Monuments and the Eighteenth-Century British Empire*. Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006, 496 pp., 160 pages of black-and-white illus., \$60.00 Cdn.

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as a metaphor for the life process (p. 221). By examining the sensorial nature (smell, taste, texture, etc.) of a chosen object in a holistic manner, Howes develops a useful model for the contemporary discussion of craft beyond the visual.

Tanya Harrod, British writer and curator, tackles the relationship between craft and new technology head-on in “Otherwise Unobtainable: The Applied Arts and the Politics and Poetics of Digital Technology.” This essay looks at the positive and negative impact of the computer on the way we think and create. The politics and also the poetics of combining craft knowledge with computer-controlled technology are discussed here in a very articulate and thoughtful way. Harrod charts the literature on new media that examines how the “physically externalized process” of “hyper-linking” is different from the more conventional internalized and “unobservable” mental and creative process (p. 228). Artists who have discovered ways to “subvert” the functions of technology in order to create artwork that would be “otherwise unobtainable” are discussed to illustrate these new approaches.

Innovative collaborative projects between craft and new technology are further explored in Love Jönsson’s memorable essay, “Rethinking Dichotomies: Crafts and the Digital.” Jönsson, a Swedish critic and writer, provides examples of the way in which contemporary craftspeople and designers are embracing technology rather than perceiving it as a threat. He cites several fascinating young collectives in Sweden, such as Front, who in its project *Sketch Furniture* uses “motion capture software to record sketches of furniture made by hand in the air,” which are then made into real furniture using rapid prototyping (pp. 243–44). Mike Press, in “Handmade Futures: The Emerging Role of Craft Knowledge in Our Digital Culture,” articulates ways in which material expertise, hand skills, and craft process can be applied and are even essential in developing innovative cross-disciplinary research (in, for example, art, science, healthcare, and space exploration) at the doctoral level. Press, a British academic in design policy, cites several cutting-edge examples of projects that have had unique and relevant real-world applications (such as the work of Graham Whiteley, who was able to apply his knowl-

edge of furniture making towards his PhD research into a robotic arm that was later used by NASA) (p. 256).

This collection of essays illustrates a multifaceted approach to situating craft in a modernist context and the editor should be congratulated for pulling together such a timely anthology. Although many interesting viewpoints are presented, it would have been valuable to include more makers among the authors to balance the predominantly historical approach. It also would have been interesting to see more references to Canadian studies and examples, although many of the findings included here have relevance for Canadian craft practice and post-secondary education. As we, in Canada, gravitate towards a research culture in our art and design programs, it is worth bearing in mind the lessons learned and international models presented here. Several books have been published in Canada that preserve the important research presented at craft symposia,³ and this book, which references a major conference on the crafts, is a very relevant new addition to this genre.

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Notes

- ¹ Paul Greenhalgh, ed., *The Persistence of Craft: The Applied Arts Today* (London, 2002), 207.
- ² See, for example, Glenn Adamson, *Thinking Through Craft* (Oxford, 2007); and Howard Risatti, *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 2007).
- ³ See, for example, Melanie Egan, Alan C. Elder, and Jean Johnson, eds., *Crafting New Traditions: Canadian Innovators and Influences* (Gatineau, 2008); Jean Johnson, ed., *Exploring Contemporary Craft: History, Theory and Critical Writing* (Toronto, 2002); Gloria A. Hickey, ed., *Common Ground: Contemporary Craft, Architecture, and the Decorative Arts* (Hull, 1999); and Gloria A. Hickey, ed., *Making and Metaphor: A Discussion of Meaning in Contemporary Craft* (Hull, 1994).

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Public monuments, as Joan Coutu argues persuasively, “are about the empire, but more important, they are about the people in it” (p. 4). Coutu’s incisive study of colonial sculpture in her aptly entitled book, *Persuasion and Propaganda: Monuments and the Eighteenth-Century British Empire*, is embedded in the tangled web of

social and political relationships spread across Britain’s colonial expanse in the eighteenth century. By focusing on specific individuals, she analyzes how monuments to which they were linked either forged connections with or marked divisions within different communities in colonial settings and in Britain. Such an approach critiques eighteenth-century ideas about heroism, self-sacrifice, and duty vital to maintaining a keen sense of British identity even in the colonies. At the same time, it also dismantles the popular focus on London as the center of Britain’s empire. Instead, Coutu navigates the locations of Jamaica, Barbados, Charleston, New York,

London, Madras, and Calcutta with equal ease. In doing so, she demonstrates the ways in which public monuments retained what she calls “the fictions of Englishness and English history” through their repeated emphasis on English rather than colonial subjects (p. 76). Along these lines, Coutu’s examination of the stock-in-trade designs commissioned by members of the colonial elite from sculptors based in London, Bristol, and Liverpool further reiterates the “Englishness” of these examples of sculpture. Her chapter devoted to this subject is especially useful in reconstructing the network of clients and sculptors that developed across the seas. As importantly, it focuses on how commissions were negotiated from prominent artists like Louis-François Roubiliac and Peter Scheemakers, as well as from lesser-known sculptors such as Michael Sidnell. A very helpful discussion of how sculptors produced monuments with the help of miniatures or painted portraits also sheds light on the ways in which these artists communicated with their overseas patrons (p. 98).

Public sculpture at home and abroad promoted the hopes and ambitions of colonial settlers. It also propped up the likes of William Pitt the Elder and Charles Cornwallis, 1st Marquess Cornwallis, as heroes, and even bore the scars of protest and revolution. Coutu, in fact, begins her book with lively if not somewhat macabre descriptions of the defacement in 1766 of George III’s marble bust in Montreal and equestrian statue in New York City by American rebel sympathizers. Thus, from the start, she analyzes monuments as social constructs whose histories were shaped by fluctuating political circumstances. A significant focal point of her discussion is Joseph Wilton’s commemorative monument for Major General James Wolfe, unveiled in 1773 in Westminster Abbey in London. Certainly, Benjamin West’s famous history painting *The Death of General Wolfe* (1771) has received a great deal of attention from art historians and historians alike. But Wilton’s sculpture has remained neglected in their analyses of the cult of Wolfe that emerged in the wake of the general’s fateful death in Quebec in 1759. Coutu remedies this oversight by re-examining Wilton’s monument within the growing Wolfomania of the time. More specifically, she examines the role of its chief protagonist behind the scenes, William Pitt, whose own political ambitions were embedded in the commission, design, and eventual display of the sculpture in Westminster Abbey. And as Coutu has argued convincingly, Pitt used Wolfe’s “commoner-patriot” persona to advance his own image of “self-sacrifice” and patriotism (p. 108). It is through such a nuanced and close reading of specific case studies like Wilton’s monument that the author reveals how public sculpture was as much about its patron as it was about the subject it commemorated. She also examines how powerful politicians like Pitt made a spectacle out of colonial history to cement their reputations.

The eighteenth-century hero who emerged from the hotbed of colonial politics was made visible through the popular press,

in the rotunda at Vauxhall Gardens, and in the hallowed halls of Westminster Abbey. Constructed as a compassionate patriot, he was glorified as the man who not only defended Britain’s liberty but also as the benevolent hero who dispensed charity. Coutu’s section entitled “A New Style for a New Empire?” raises important questions about the visual representation of the modern-day hero typically displayed in contemporary dress, albeit laden with classical allusions to boost his image. It is refreshing that the author compares Francis Hayman’s famous images for Vauxhall depicting General Amherst and Lord Clive with Wilton’s Wolfe monument. Weaving her way through history painting and public sculpture, she demonstrates the close links between these two genres in creating specific types of British colonial heroes. It would have been useful, however, to have a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between the two genres that shaped the fiction of the British Empire as a peacekeeping force in public settings. What, for instance, did monuments accomplish that history paintings did not in the making of British heroes?

Coutu’s analysis of monuments as visible signs of Britain’s magnanimous empire underscores her compelling discussion of public sculpture in the American colonies. An interesting focal point is Joseph Wilton’s marble bust of George III sent to Montreal in 1766. The first example in sculpture to celebrate a British monarch as an emperor, it asserted the British king’s presence amid 65,000 Canadiens who became British subjects in the wake of Wolfe’s victory. By examining the monarch as a colonial hero who had come to the aid of the Canadiens after the fire of 1765 in Montreal, Coutu gives a fresh approach to understanding royal propaganda in the colonial context. As she demonstrates, the bust represented a break from British restraint. Erecting statues of kings seemed to be a popular French tradition, one that British monarchs avoided in part because of the enthusiasm of their French counterparts to have numerous images of themselves replicated and exhibited in prominent spaces. Against this background, the author presents an excellent and sensitive discussion of how colonial cities like Montreal forged a new visibility for the British monarch. Aside from the now inextricable link between the king and his empire, the location of the bust across from the Notre-Dame Church hammered home the king’s triumph over French Catholicism. As she does throughout her book, Coutu yet again addresses the fragile destiny of such works of art frequently subject to political upheaval. Once valorized as a symbol of imperial munificence, the king’s bust was vandalized nearly a decade later in the winter of 1775–76 by American sympathizers. Removed from its pedestal, its erasure expressed the American quest for democracy, an identity splintered from the larger imperial presence signified by portraits of British royalty.

On 12 April 1782, Admiral George Brydges Rodney defeated the French in the Battle of the Saintes, thereby securing Jamaica’s safety and protecting trade routes between the Carib-

bean and the British Isles. Within a year, the Jamaican House of Assembly had commissioned a statue of the admiral to be erected in Spanish Town. The Rodney monument not only commemorated an important British hero, it also celebrated a prominent local victory. As such, Coutu steers her discussion admirably towards the transformation of colonial settings into mature political entities. She also examines how they remained connected to Britain while simultaneously shaping a separate identity from the mother country. Indeed, her discussion of public commissions in the West Indies, including the Rodney monument, is one of the most insightful chapters of her book. It is here that she peels apart the hierarchies of British society in the islands, from the planters and merchants who comprised the Jamaican assembly to the doctors and attorneys who also commissioned public sculptures from Wilton and John Bacon the Elder, among others. The Rodney monument also contained the first personification of Jamaica represented quite predictably as a young woman protected by Britannia. While Britain's military men were portrayed as heroes in various colonies, a different kind of valorization evolved within the local landscape. In 1791, nearly 20,000 slaves rebelled against white planters on the French island of St. Domingue. The Jamaican governor, Thomas Howard, the Earl of Effingham, came to the rescue of the white inhabitants, a gesture recognized by both Louis XVI and George III. But divisions were deep in England over the issue of slavery. Just a few years earlier, William Wilberforce had struck out against the plantocracy and the slave trade in the House of Commons in London. Thus, Coutu's examination of the elaborate funeral monument for the earl and his countess commissioned by the Jamaican assembly from the London-based John Bacon the Elder testifies to the range of political and social issues that plagued the British Empire. More specifically, she reveals the extent to which colonists remained staunchly loyal to their own histories even though that meant separating themselves from the debates in England. If anything, the monument to Effingham emphasizes that heroes were also constructed within colonial communities. Furthermore, colonial ideas about heroism were sometimes at odds with political debates raging in Britain.

Coutu's last chapter focuses on India, the most complicated political and social landscape of British colonial power. Given the geographical expanse and cultural range of the Indian subcontinent, the task of condensing an analysis of public monuments into a single chapter is daunting. Thus the author understandably examines just a handful of monuments from London, Madras, and Calcutta. But even these few examples are dealt with thoroughly such that the reader understands how a mercantile enterprise like the East India Company relied on the pictorial vocabulary of public sculpture to validate its presence both at home and in India. Coutu analyzes the theme of imperial benevolence in

the Indian context as a means to justify the Company's military conflicts with the French forces and different Indian armies. At first glance, commissions for statues and monuments commemorating important Company administrators may look very similar to those made for other colonies, or for that matter, for domestic British patrons. But there was a fundamental difference. The Company's heroes had to be constructed against those of other powerful empires already in place in India. To this end, the reader wishes the author had probed further into the complex layers of India's social history embedded in monuments like Thomas Banks's sculpture commemorating Lieutenant General Sir Eyre Coote located in Westminster Abbey. The prominent central focus on Persian armour is only mentioned in passing, whereas it is the most compelling reiteration of the defeat of the formidable Hyder Ali's forces in the Deccan. In short, it signifies Sir Eyre Coote's conquest of Islamic power in South India. Juxtaposed with the figure of the mourning Hindu (even more specifically, a Brahmin), the Persian armour conveys the overall message that Muslim and Hindu constituents had been defeated successfully by British troops. And it is through such juxtapositions that the challenge of establishing colonial power in the culturally varied landscape of India emerged in a public monument exhibited halfway across the world in London. It would have been helpful also if the author had investigated the additional significance of the taste for neoclassical sculpture in India vis-à-vis Alexander of Macedon, a figure who loomed large in the British imagination as the first European conqueror to have invaded India. By the eighteenth century, Alexander's Indian conquests had become part and parcel of British history books, in which they were positioned as precursors to Britain's own forays into the subcontinent. In this manner, a legacy was constructed between Alexander and eighteenth-century Company exploits. Thus, the significance of a neoclassical vocabulary is especially charged in colonial British India, considering the close points of contact between Alexander and subsequent Hellenistic generals and Indians.

Overall, Coutu's book is a ground-breaking study in the history of British colonial sculpture about which little has been discussed definitively. The geographical scope of her study establishes just how complicated Britain's colonial monuments were in the range of political and social histories they encompassed. At the same time, her examination also establishes how repetitive these monuments were, in large part to keep intact the boundaries of British identity and taste. Accompanied by an impressive bibliography, Coutu's book will foster fresh studies of colonial sculpture, history painting, and architecture.

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