

**Michael Snodin and Nigel Llewellyn, eds.; assisted by Joanna Norman, *Baroque: Style in the Age of Magnificence, 1620–1800*. Exhibition catalogue, London, V&A Publishing, 2009, 372 pp., 170 colour illust., \$95, ISBN-978-1-85177-558-3**

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world of prints. In her discussion of the print versions of his paintings, Rix correctly asserts that through the dissemination of prints Hunt was able to carry “his vision to the world,” notably through prints of *The Light of the World*. Thousands of these prints were sold on the replica’s 1905 tour, and, according to Rix, the image’s popularity spoke to its legibility. Hunt made a considerable fortune selling the rights of his pictures to printers, who in turn made large sums of profit, proving without question Hunt’s incredible public appeal, despite having become out of step with avant-garde artistic trends. Rix’s strongest moment is her surprising and inspired conclusion. Perhaps, then, the last

word must go to Rix, who eloquently recalls how thousands of people flocked to pay their respects to Hunt’s cremated remains at St. Paul’s Cathedral. Over Hunt’s casket was an engraving of his celebrated *The Light of the World*. According to Rix, this juxtaposition of print and casket provided “a tangible reminder that Hunt held fast to his Pre-Raphaelite vision to the end, and that he did so by embracing, reinventing, and exploiting the world of prints” (p. 188), thus solidifying his public appeal and cultural relevance.

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Michael Snodin and Nigel Llewellyn, eds.; assisted by Joanna Norman, *Baroque: Style in the Age of Magnificence, 1620–1800*. Exhibition catalogue, London, V&A Publishing, 2009, 372 pp., 170 colour illust., \$95, ISBN- 978-1-85177-558-3.

The Victoria and Albert Museum’s recent exhibition addressing the Baroque style in fine and decorative art was accompanied by a scholarly, illustrated catalogue. The exhibition, running from April to July 2009, and curated by Michael Snodin and Nigel Llewellyn, was wide-ranging, incorporating architecture and painting together with furniture and the applied arts, theatre design, costume, garden design, and the rise of ephemeral art forms for festivals, beginning in the late seventeenth century. The lavishly illustrated catalogue is organized into five sections. Each section begins with a title article by one of the exhibition’s two curators, followed by individual, themed contributions by specialist scholars and museum curators. This structure adds to the strength of the volume, which is unprecedented in geographical scope, covering many lesser-known regions influenced by the pervasive Baroque style, particularly Goa, Indonesia, and China.

As such, the text is a refreshing new contribution to existing scholarship in a field that has recently seen the publication of interesting accounts covering non-European regions, including China and Japan, such as those by Alden Cavanaugh and Michael E. Yonan.<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy that the curators’ periodization of the Baroque style includes the end of the eighteenth century, as referred to more than once in the accompanying text. The Baroque style continued to spread globally throughout the eighteenth century via travel by artists and architects and by European colonization to other regions, which is undoubtedly why the curators extended the timeframe for the period.

Especially interesting, with reference to Europe, is the demonstration of how this style reached the Scandinavian courts of Sweden and Norway and spread across the Baltic to Russia. The catalogue contributions for those sections of the exhibition

are counterbalanced by contributions on canonical works and centres of the Baroque, including Rodney Palmer’s account of the role of the *bizzarria* (the bizarre) in Counter-Reformation Rome, Michael Levy’s hefty contributions on Rome and Paris, a multi-authored section discussing Baroque palatial apartment and garden design and its role in immortalizing members of the Baroque elite, and Evonne Levy’s discussion of sculpture by GianLorenzo Bernini. Evonne Levy’s contribution begins with a formal analysis of Bernini’s work *in situ* at the Cornaro chapel in S. Maria della Vittoria, Rome, and effortlessly proceeds to a pan-European analysis of decorative arts in the Baroque style, emphasizing human figures in dramatic and often contorted poses analogous to Bernini’s *St. Teresa of Avila in Ecstasy*. It is noteworthy that she highlights the assimilation of classical mythologies into Baroque schemes of ornamentation and discusses examples of these from the exhibition, including a figure of Hercules featured on King William III’s pier table from his palatial country seat, Het Loo in Holland, and Giovanni Paolo Schor’s design for a state bed ornamented with sea nymphs on horseback, commissioned for Maria Mancini Colonna on the birth of her son. Details of less-celebrated decorative genres of the Baroque, such as the role of grotesques (which also remained crucial in the development of Rococo ornament during the mid-eighteenth century) and flower painting in Baroque ornamentation, further add to the strengths of this essay.

Importantly, the catalogue also demonstrates this style’s influence in India, the Philippines, Peru, Brazil, Indonesia, and China. The Chinese Emperor Quianlong built a European-style palace with a series of pavilions, fountains, and a maze in the grounds of his summer residence. One of the pavilions (ca. 1781), named the *Haiyantang* or “Calm Sea” palace, was constructed in imitation of Versailles Palace outside Paris. Although the pavilion was destroyed in 1860, a drawing by the artist Yi Lantai is preserved in a copperplate engraving at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and accurately conveys the appearance of this architectural copy. This section of the Chinese exhibit and

the sections illustrating the decoration of the Church of Bom Jesus in Old Goa and the Villa Imperial de Potosi, Bolivia, represent a small percentage of the art discussed in the catalogue text, yet add to the originality of the catalogue as a contribution to scholarship in this field. Marjorie Trusted, for example, diversifies her interest in early modern sculpture to discuss the fusion of indigenous and Spanish techniques of decoration at the Church of St. Francisco in Sucre, Bolivia, and explores hybridized religious iconographies that emerged in the wake of colonization. The catalogue also briefly highlights the point that European expansion was not confined to the sea empires. The Peace of Karlowitz in 1699, signed at the heart of Europe during the middle of the Baroque period, brought former Ottoman territories in the Balkans and the Peloponnese region under rule by Austria, Poland, and the Venetian Republic.

The exhibition's final section sought to recreate interior and exterior decoration at Baroque palaces across Europe. Michael Snodin's erudite contribution to the catalogue explores key ritual practices (dining in public, ceremonial audiences, garden theatre, and dancing) surrounding absolute rulers and the public spaces of socialization they occupied. The international designers of these schemes for public spaces, which were intended to reflect the immortality of their owners, became extremely adept at imitating the craftsmanship of French-trained artists employed by Louis XVIII of France, as seen, for example, in the work of Swedish furniture designer Christoffer Merker and German panel sculptor Ferdinand Plitzner, lavishly illustrated in the text. The variety of works on canvas used to illustrate Snodin's account of palatial apartments throughout Europe is impressive. Works of portraiture and mythology, on loan for the exhibition from Versailles and the Trianon Palace, Kupferstich-Kabinett in Dresden, the Municipal Palace, Parma, and the Gissfeld Kloster, Denmark, are all reproduced in colour.

The exhibition has helped to demonstrate that the Baroque style also took root in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain. Architectural examples from Greenwich Palace to works by the eighteenth-century architect James Gibbs, a closet Roman Catholic who trained in Rome, are included together with state portraits of Charles II and James II celebrating their virtues as (Baroque) princes. In an essay on British decorative arts, Lucy Wood's account of the International English Chair reveals the "brand" power of much English design from this period. Straight-backed chairs in walnut with caning were manufactured at the rate of 70,000 per year and approximately 24,000 of these were exported to India and South-East Asia. Designs were copied by Indonesian craftsmen using teak as a material to replicate the chairs. Wood's (albeit brief) discussion of such standard examples of Baroque design used in households inhabited by social classes described by historian Lawrence Klein as "middling" types reflects a broader intention on

the part of the curators to diversify the range of illustrations of the Baroque style.

While the scope of this exhibition is little short of exhaustive, there are centres of the Baroque style that were overlooked. Northern, north-western, and central Germany (especially the Court of Frederick I in Berlin, Thuringen at Schloss Heidecksburg, and Brunswick-Lunenburg at Schloss Herrenhausen, Hannover), and Guarino Guarini's architecture in Piedmont, Italy, have been neglected, despite being crucial regions to the development of the Baroque style and its appropriation for political ends. In Germany, the Baroque became the style of choice for Electors, Dukes, and lesser aristocrats seeking social distinction and advancement within the Holy Roman Empire. In Northern Italy, by the mid-1640s, the Baroque style became a near obsession for architects seeking to outdo the virtuoso architectural designs seen on Roman churches and basilicas. The omission of textual reference to (if not illustration of) the development of early to mid-eighteenth-century French *régence* and rococo modes of ornamentation in response to the decorative paradigms established at Versailles is also something of a critical blind spot in the concluding sections of the text. Nonetheless, this is an ambitious exhibition and catalogue.

While this catalogue will be read by museum curators and specialist scholars across the disciplines (art history, theatre studies, history, and cultural studies), aspects of its production, such as lavish illustrations, colour-rich backgrounds for sections of the text, and an enticing cover, have been aimed at the general reader.

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#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See Alden Cavanaugh and Michael E. Yonan, *The Cultural Aesthetics of Eighteenth-Century Porcelain* (Aldershot, 2009).