



Norberto Gramaccini / Hans Jakob Meier: Die Kunst der Interpretation. Die französische Reproduktionsgraphik von 1648 bis 1792, München / Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag 2002, 328 S., 21 Farb-, 200 s/w-Abb., ISBN 3-422-06356-0, EUR 98,00.

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This book aims to close a serious gap in print scholarship. There has been relatively little written in the past twenty or thirty years on the subject of French interpretative prints. The authors took on a difficult task, not only in attempting to follow the foundation of the Académie Royale de peinture et de sculpture in 1648 and its closure in 1792. According to the foreword, the selection is intended to include not only the most important engravers and etchers but also to give an overview of the various categories of printmaking. To realize this task, they decided to insert a somewhat short main text, followed by a first block of images, then a catalogue of 184 sheets, and an appendix, including some 17th and 18th-century sources, indices and a bibliography. The catalogue is divided into three sections, a first part dealing with the period from the foundation of the Académie Royale until the resumption of the Salons in 1737, a second dealing with prints from 1737 until the disbanding of the Académie and a third which deals with prints after drawings and prints in colour. All prints are described in single entries with the usual technical details, the date (mostly omitted if it does not appear on the print itself), and the shelf mark in the Bibliothèque Nationale. These technical details are followed by a discussion of the print: its relationship to other prints after the same original or its relationship to the original itself, often with some biographical information and also a brief commentary on the perception of the print. The bibliographical material given is understandably not entirely comprehensive but nonetheless informative. In general, the catalogue is set out in a sort of chronological order, although it is difficult to follow the exact criteria. This is a minor detail and it does not affect its usefulness. The two indices, one dealing with painters and draughtsmen whose work is reproduced, the other listing the printmakers, significantly extend the usefulness of the catalogue. All the prints are reproduced and mostly printed with care, although in a few cases they are cropped, especially the large sheets mounted in volumes where this problem is endemic. This might have been avoided by using either another impression in the Bibliothèque Nationale or an impression in another collection.

Although the catalogue is the core of the book, it is not placed at the beginning. The book starts with a text subdivided into six chapters. The first tries to outline the general situation and to give an overview of the current state of research; the second deals with the beginning of interpretative printmaking in the 15th and 16th centuries, mainly in Germany and Italy; the third concentrates on the function of this kind of prints in France in the 17th and 18th centuries; the fourth discusses the history of their perception; the fifth deals with the sources of the 18th and early 19th centuries and the last tries to summarize the previous chapters in a comparison of the original art work with the printed interpretation. This part of the book raises a few questions. Why does a book on

such a highly specific and concentrated subject need to begin with a discussion of printmaking of the mid 15th century, especially when there are no images used to support the argument? The facts are well known nowadays, especially after recent ground-breaking research by Susan Lambert, David Landau and Peter Parshall and Michael Bury, to name but a few. The summary of their work, with no new insights, is somewhat redundant in the present context. One may take it for granted that French printmakers from the second quarter of the 17th century onwards would have been perfectly aware of previous developments in Germany, The Netherlands and Italy. A specific comparison between the situation in the Dutch and Flemish centres, in Italy or even in Germany would have been more useful and would have given a much clearer idea of the accomplishments of French printmakers. Although the authors try to emphasise this in the third and fourth chapters, even here, the material discussed is fairly well known. For someone not familiar with the history of French printmaking, this might be of interest, but for scholars working on the subject, there are few new insights. To be fair, the foreword indicates that the book was not written mainly for scholars. However, one cannot help regretting that the authors have lost an opportunity to provide a much clearer understanding of this subject because of their notion that a publication of this kind has to provide an entire history of the theme. Inevitably, the quality of the text has suffered. While there are many insights in the catalogue section, the introductory text is somewhat weak and does not provide the same density of information and critical analysis as is found in the catalogue. Furthermore, there was no need to republish an article of recent date as chapter six, formerly published in a catalogue edited by Robert Stalla in Munich in 2001.

Furthermore there are a number of small but significant mistakes. Many books and discoveries, which one would have expected to find are missing. In the second chapter there is no reference to the fine catalogue by Corinna Höper (Stuttgart 2001), or to the groundbreaking article by Margret Stufmann on the Crozat collection in the following chapter. Both are mentioned in the bibliography and again in the catalogue entries. Other books used in the catalogue or mentioned in the appendix are also overlooked in the discussion of the wider context. In addition, the catalogue, although generally sound, is not free from disturbing mistakes and omissions. To make a selection like this from a huge number of prints available and covering such a long period is clearly not an easy task but it is hard to understand why some important prints and recueils are missing. The "Gallerie du Palais du Luxembourg" from 1710 or the "Gallerie du Palais Royal", published from 1786 onwards, were major moments in the history of printmaking in France and should have been included in an overview of the subject in this period. A distressing gap is produced, excluding Jean Morin from the catalogue. It is not entirely clear, if the authors just have not come across him or - in opposition to many other scholars - range him as not important. From other printmakers one would have expected other sheets, for example, why are no portraits by Claude Mellan reproduced, the astonishing portrait of François Langlois by Jean Pesne (about 1665), Nanteuil's portrait of Christina of Sweden (1654), Edelinck's portrait of Champagne, why are all prints for dissertations missing, the almanacs, all the prints after Antiques excluded although an important part of French printmaking during the 18th century, or why is the amount of sheets by amateurs so high, although the selection is neither complete not very lightening?

Portraits also have suffered. Although the portrait was the main subject for printmakers applying for membership of the Académie Royale, only a few examples are discussed. One might argue that this subject has already been well covered by the exhibition

curated by William McAllister Johnson in 1982, but the exemplary importance of these sheets and the process involved should have earned them a larger place in the present text. Beside the "pièces de receptions", it is hard to understand why the official "Portrait du Sacre" of Louis XVI by Johann Gotthard Müller (please note that in no. 152 the engraver is not called Johann Georg, that he was born in 1747 and that the technique is a combination of etching and engraving) is not mentioned although the competitive sheet by his friend Bervic is discussed. The commission was given to Müller in 1782 and the sheet was published in Germany in 1792, after long discussions with the Comte d'Angiviller. This touches on another important question for some of the printmakers used in this book: the perception of engravers as French, if they have been trained in Paris or worked largely in Paris or have been of French origin and worked abroad. The question applies to Edelinck and Lombart in the 17th century and to Schmidt, Wille, and Müller for the 18th century. It is a strange situation to see that French critiques ranged them as French, where German scholars and critics approached the idea of national printmaking.

Some slips in the bibliography and the text as well as a general methodological problem reduce the usefulness of the publication as a handbook. On the one hand the authors try to show and convince that interpretative printmaking was a serious business with major theoretical implications, on the other hand, they continue to speak of reproductive printmaking with all its implications of Benjamin's understanding. Although this question was discussed in the past ten years in much detail, it has not left many traces in the text. Some important articles on this subject are missing, and others, mentioned in the bibliography, seem not to have had a huge impact on the text. The same undecidedness is remarkable in the selection. Oriented at the Académie Royale, and using its date of founding and closure as the starting and ending point of their catalogue, the role and importance of this institution remains rather unclear in the selection of the sheets. And therefore it is pretty hard to understand, why the catalogue ends in 1792 although printmaking has not stopped at that time, in contrary, Laurent and Robillard-Perronville started that year their luxurious and ambitious publication of the "Musée français" or the "Galerie du Palais Royal" continued.

Beside this many recent or important books are missing. Even books mentioned in the notes by the authors cannot be found in the bibliography, like Florent Le Comte and Puttfarken's book on Roger de Piles, both mentioned page 62 but missing in the bibliography. One has an impression that proof-reading and copy-editing were hurried and careless. The author named as "A.J.Dézallier d'Angiviller" seems to have been created through an amusing compound of Antoine-Joseph Dézallier d'Argenville and Charles-Claude Comte d'Angiviller. As a whole, the book is useful for its images but the catalogue needs checking before it can be used. It would have benefited from a different structure. In place of the academic and somewhat uninteresting chronological approach adopted, it would have been better if it had been arranged according to the different genres, as Sue Welsh Reed arranged her catalogue in 1998. This would not only have given a deeper insight into the development in France but would have drawn attention to the links between the younger printmakers and the previous generation. It would also have cast light on the perception of 17th-century printmaking in the following century. What is needed is a book which deals in several chapters with the different genres, technical innovations, the perception of prints as reflected in the market, the theory of collecting contemporary prints (an issue which is largely overlooked), the arrangement of these collections, the function of prints in the various contexts and the role of the printmaker as publisher. This would probably give a much better idea of the situation in

France during the 17th and 18th centuries and it would emphasize the innovative approach taken by publishers, collectors, printmakers, amateurs, and clients at that time.

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