Jeffrey Chipps Smith, ed.

Visual Acuity and the Arts of Communication in Early Modern Germany. Visual Culture in Early Modernity. Farnham; Burlington: Ashgate, 2014. Pp. xv + 226. Hb, \$104.95.

Several recent studies have placed German-speaking lands at the heart of early modern exchanges of knowledge throughout Europe and across distant parts of the globe. *Visual Acuity and the Arts of Communication in Early Modern Germany* features ten wide-ranging chapters that further identify early modern Germany as a well-connected region at the forefront of innovations in communication via print and beyond. The volume draws its name from the theme of the 2012 international conference of Frühe Neuzeit Interdisziplinär. This work also remains true to the interdisciplinary focus of Frühe Neuzeit Interdisziplinär and contains contributions from scholars from both sides of the Atlantic in the fields of art history, history, music, and musicology. The broadly unifying theme of “visual acuity” is defined as “a keen awareness of the power of visualization” which the authors apply in varying ways (1). The entries are roughly arranged chronologically from the late fifteenth to early eighteenth centuries and cover a diverse spectrum of sub-themes. The broad scope of topics make this volume dynamic and interesting. By taking an individual case-study approach rather than forcing an attempt at a larger synthesis, editor Jeffrey Chipps Smith and the contributors have created a volume that highlights the multiplicity of ways in which visual presentation and reception were utilized in early modern Germany.

The book's ten chapters will have points of contact for anyone with an interest in early modern Germany. Allison Stielau contributes a keen study of the engraved representations of isolated objects which were first produced by a few master printmakers in the late fifteenth century. These “object engravings” (23), as Stielau terms them, actually mark early modern examples of artists calling attention to the relationship between viewer and object. Bridget Heal's case-study of a crucifix in a remote mountain region in southern Saxony offers a unique perspective on the relationship between Lutheranism and devotional images. In the Erzgebirge, a Lutheran mining region, the crucifix and other images depicted a sense of God's protection over the minors and, as Heal points out, also provide an example of a visual rather than text-based form of Lutheran piety. Susanne Meurer examines the fascinating topic of calligraphy in sixteenth-century Nuremberg, calling attention to a case in which penmanship becomes essential to understanding a text in its historical context. Andrew Morrall offers a detailed study of goldsmith Jonas Silber's 1589 *Universe Cup*, a

magnificently ornate silver-gilt cup featuring a miniature model of the universe. By putting a special emphasis on the local world of the craftsmen who created such objects, Morrall's analysis of the *Universe Cup* makes an important contribution to the broader scholarship on the *Kunstammer* and the milieu of collector-patrons who amassed such items. Ruth Slenczka carefully reads Georg Mylius's 1586 funeral sermon for the famous artist Lucas Cranach the Younger, offering a unique perspective on how Lutherans viewed art—or to put it more precisely, how Lutherans viewed the viewers of art. Alexander J. Fisher provides the first of two chapters in the book that explore the combination of music and the visual. Fisher brings to light a rare historical occurrence in which the Basilica of Saints Ulrich and Afra in early seventeenth-century Augsburg had a bronze sculpture and performances of a musical dialogue based on the same biblical scene: the crucifixion with Mary and John. Fisher finds that a similar visual and aural strategy was employed which aimed to draw attention to the divine message of the scene rather than the artistic mediums that conveyed it. Anthony Mahler's contribution may be of special interest to readers of this journal, as it examines Jesuit Jacob Bidermann's (1578–1639) play *Cenodoxus*. In this theoretically rich chapter, the staging of this play and the purported reaction of its audiences reveal ways in which vision and self-vision were of central importance to Ignatian spirituality. Arne Spohr provides a second chapter related to music. His study about “concealed music” in the court of Danish King Christian IV examines how hiding musicians from view functioned as a tool for controlling sound and representing power. Volker Bauer studies seventeenth-century depictions of dynastic genealogies as family trees. His fascinating study traces how a special tree in Mexico, the banyan tree, became the preferred arboreal model for representing a family's ties to other major princely houses throughout Europe. Finally, Kristoffer Neville brings the book into the dawn of the eighteenth century with a chapter on the efforts of Friedrich I, king of Prussia, to transform Berlin architecturally into a royal capital. Neville convincingly argues that rather than reproducing specific architectural styles from other regions of Europe, especially Italy and France, Friedrich sought a uniquely royal image in his buildings that diverged from existing prototypes.

These ten case-studies offer a somewhat eclectic perspective on the ways people visualized themselves and aspects of their world in early modern Germany. While for most readers some chapters are likely to be of more scholarly interest than others, it would be a loss to have this volume in hand and only read one or two of the entries. If nothing else, the illustrations—of which there are a plentiful sixty—are worth viewing. The format, a series of case-studies, allows for concise chapters that are still well-developed. Readers will

benefit from the easily accessible works cited lists and endnotes at the conclusion of each chapter in addition to the index at the back of the volume. As a whole, this book capitalizes on the benefits that interdisciplinary projects offer. Anyone interested in some of the themes or historical subjects mentioned above should read this book in its entirety and expect to make new discoveries in less familiar territories as well.

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