Moritorum Monumentum Non Morituris Cineribus:
Jacob Franquart’s Funeral Procession
for Albert of Austria, 1622

Tamar Cholcman

In recent years there has been a renewed and growing interest in the ephemeral art of court festivals, state homages, funeral processions, and the art of the carnival. The tradition of ephemeral art flourished in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries. Its name was derived from the Greek ephémerios, meaning “for the duration of one day.” Created for public events, such as triumphal processions, weddings, or court funerals, it encompassed visual arts of architecture, painting, and sculpture, and performing arts of theatre and music. Ephemeric Art in its day and age was the expression of both artistic traditions of the Renaissance and traditions of court and state art. However, modern history has tended to judge its pictorial, architectural, and theatrical aspects as propaganda art, emphasizing its value to the study of political and cultural history, rather than discussing it in the context of art history.

We should, instead, view the ephemeral art of festivals as an independent art form with specific, distinct characteristics derived from its particular form of temporal existence. Ephemeric Art should be regarded as a distinctive form of both fine art and court propaganda with not one but two facets, or even phases, of existence, both simultaneous and sequential: the plastic expression, which was temporally and materially limited and is therefore ephemeral, and the recorded existence, which was unlimited and enduring and thus suggestive of more conventional art forms. This article presents and analyzes these two aspects of Ephemeric Art as they appear in the Pompa Funebris Alberti—the documentation of the funeral procession of the Spanish governor of the Netherlands, Archduke Albert of Austria, which took place in Brussels on March 12, 1622, as it was conceived and recorded by the artist and court architect

EIRC 33.1 (Summer 2007): 109-132
Jacob Franquart. The book was published as an illustrated volume by Jan Mommaert in Brussels in 1623 (Fig. 1).


I. The Spanish Netherlands

The 1590s were difficult years for Spain, both economically and politically, especially with the failure to capture the French crown and the continuing threat of the loss of the Low Countries. A report sent to Philip II from Brussels illustrates the problems facing the Spanish King:

Past experience shows your Majesty that neither gold from Peru, nor [your] soldiers from Spain, Italy and Germany, will hand you a victory over the rebels of Flanders, who have brought the war across the sea and are threatening [now] your Majesty’s advance in the Indies [New World]. (Llanos y Toriglia 18)

Maintaining control of the Low Countries was imperative for Spain at that time. The loss of the territory would not only have weakened the Spanish crown's position in Europe and the New World and compromised Philip II's own position and authority, especially morally, as Defender of the Christian Empire, but its loss would have threatened the Spanish House of Habsburg's position as the champion of the war against heresy as well (Alcala-Zamora y Queipo de Llano 160). This had engendered a change of policy in the Spanish court, as Philip II tried to bring about an accord between Spain and the dissidents in the Low Countries and France through diplomatic means rather than force.

Consequently, Albert of Austria, who inherited from his brother, the