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Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg

- 23-3** *Die Ordnung der Dinge* : graphische Serien erklären die Welt ; Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg ; [... anlässlich der Ausstellung 'Die Ordnung der Dinge. Graphische Serien erklären die Welt', 7. Juli bis 8. Oktober 2023 in den Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg] / Stefanie Knöll (Hrsg.). - 1. Aufl. - Regensburg : Schnell & Steiner, 2023. - 304 S. : Ill. ; 28 cm. - ISBN 978-3-7954-3790-9 : EUR 39.95
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For millennia humans have grappled with understanding their unique position within the cosmos, and in gazing toward the skies, they have often seen correspondences between the microcosm and the macrocosm. Within this context, certain numbers long ago took on special significance, frequently within the realm of religion. One such number is the number 12, which by 500 B.C. in Babylonia referred to the signs of the zodiac and in ancient Greece to the major gods on Mount Olympus. In the Bible, we find it in connection with the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve minor prophets of the Old Testament, the Twelve Apostles, and the twelve gates in the Book of Revelation, as well as in other contexts. Of course, the knowledge of the world and of the cosmos was not static. The discovery of America, for example, replaced the biblical belief in three continents with the knowledge of four, and Galileo's telescope altered fundamentally scientific knowledge of the heavens.

By the early modern period the significance of certain numbers was part of people's general intellectual framework, and this is what is demonstrated clearly and in detail in the present work. Printmakers drew on this common knowledge as they produced print series – generally devoid of contentious theological interpretation – that would appeal to a discerning public of all faiths: the seven planets, the four elements, the five senses, the seven liberal arts, and seven virtues, to mention but a few. All of the series reproduced here are primarily the work of leading engravers from the Low Countries, such as Lucas van Leyden, Hieronymus Wierix, Philips Galle, and

Crispijn de Passe I. These and other artists were faced with the challenge of making abstract concepts visual, and the prints they created often have a complex visual structure with elements that point to a deeper meaning. Clearly, those who purchased the prints could draw both aesthetic and intellectual pleasure from them. One might assume that the audience was highly educated, although the fact that many texts are bilingual would point to a broader readership, and this is underscored by the fact that one finds these print series in collections assembled by aristocrats as well as by commoners.

The present volume is an illustrated catalog¹ to accompany an exhibit at the Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg (7 July to 8 October 2023),² which houses one of the most important print collections in Europe. Richly illustrated with high-quality half-tone reproductions, it is a catalog that invites close inspection. The first section of almost 100 pages includes seven illuminating essays that help to place the print series within a cultural and art historical context. This section is followed by the core of the catalog: detailed descriptions of eleven general series. Each is introduced by one page of background information followed by more detailed information related to the individual print series. The texts are clearly written, so that they, like the prints themselves, can be enjoyed by people of varying intellectual backgrounds.

It is natural for an exhibit such as this that the prints selected by the curators are of the highest quality, although this could cause visitors to have a misleading assumption about the original print market. Many, many series available at the time were the work of mediocre artists who frequently copied prints by leading artists such as the ones represented here, but that simply underscores the strong demand for and prevalence of these print series throughout the early modern period. Anyone at the time who wanted to purchase one of these series would have had little difficulty in acquiring one.

This catalog deserves to be studied carefully, for it helps to expand our understanding of the early modern period by highlighting broadly held beliefs in how the world is ordered. For those with a strong scholarly interest in the topic, for further study there is an extensive bibliography of secondary literature on the topic. If there is one thing that is unfortunately lacking, it is a general index, which at the very least should have contained references to the various artists and print publishers. Nevertheless, the catalog, which is well conceived and beautifully presented, can be highly recommended.

John Roger Paas

QUELLE

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¹ Content: <https://d-nb.info/1279324716/04>

² <https://veste.kunstsammlungen-coburg.de/dieordnungderdinge/> [2023-08-20].

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