



Review

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Die sichtbare Welt: Visualität in der niederländischen Literatur und Kunst des 17. Jahrhunderts, ed. by Maria-Theresia Leuker, *Niederlande-Studien* 52 (Münster: Waxmann, 2012).

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Scholars have long recognized visuality's privileged position in the culture of the Dutch Golden Age. The meaning of 'visuality' itself, however, is often assumed to be self-evident. This collection of essays takes up questions about the meaning and significance of the visual in both theory and practice. The authors approach these themes from a broad range of methodological perspectives, from art history and visual studies to literature and the history of drama. The result is a wide-ranging volume that contributes to our understanding of the complexity of early modern visual culture in the Low Countries and beyond. Throughout, the authors interrogate the valences of such themes as vision, visibility and representation, deftly differentiating between physiological and intellectual aspects of seeing and between the visible world itself and the processes of its interpretation. Visuality, as Maria-Theresia Leuker's introduction and the subsequent essays remind us, incorporates practices as well as objects, the empirical as well as the allegorical.

The volume's organization does much to draw forth these multiple meanings. The first group of essays explores the interconnection of visuality and modernity, both highlighting and problematizing a persistent question in the historiography of visual culture. Erich Kleinschmidt's chapter explores this question through the visual theory of the Golden Age, while Peter Bexte and Thomas Ketelsen examine its visual manifestations in depictions of blindness and panoramic images respectively. Subsequent essays further elucidate this interplay of visual theories and visual objects, considering such diverse themes as visuality as praxis and rhetorical parallels between literary sources and visual art. Others consider the interplay of visuality and religious culture: Jürgen Pieters explores the eschatological significance of visual metaphors in a poem of Constantijn Huygens, while Almut Pollmer-Schmidt contributes to the extensive literature on emblems in an examination of their exegetical and meditative functions. Still others examine the use of the visual to articulate political and social order, including Lia van Gemert's focus [151] on the construction and display of power in the theater and Denise Daum's examination of the visual construction of racial categories. The volume culminates with a group of essays on the development of optical instruments. Together with Karin Leonhard's exploration of the link between the microscope's effect on the understanding of colour, Frans-Willem Korsten examines the telescope's role in

changing perceptions of the natural world, while Wibke Larink employs anatomical illustrations to elucidate how these transformations took part in the reconceptualisation of the human body itself.

While the essays range widely, the volume's structure frames the whole within the overarching question of visibility's connection to modernity. Taken together, the chapters thus contribute substantially to our understandings of subjectivity, political centralization and global expansion. The volume's greatest strength, though, lies in its exploration of interconnections among these as well as other themes in the study of the visual. The essays frequently draw together theories of the visual with visual objects themselves: where Kleinschmidt examines optical theory, for example, Ketelsen focuses on paintings as evidence for the formation of the subject in the Golden Age. So too, the volume interrogates the boundaries between disciplinary approaches to the visual, with scholars such as Claudia Fritzsche incorporating multiple methods – in this case, from art history and the history of drama – into a single study. The collected essays thus demonstrate the breadth of sources and approaches scholars might take in further studies of visibility. Perhaps most intriguing, though, are the connections implied across divisions within the volume itself. The theme of blindness, for example, recurs throughout the volume: Bexte employs depictions of blindness to differentiate between visibility and visibility while Pieters returns to blindness as a religious metaphor and Leuker's 'blind seer of Ambon' provides the basis for a discussion of the connections between vision and curiosity in a widening world. One wonders, as a result, how a reordering of the essays might yield still other implications for the study of the visual. Such implicit intersections, though, also draw forth the volume's most significant contribution: for all that we have learned about visibility, the essays suggest, there is much to be gained from attention to the plurality and complexity of its meanings.