

The Clamor of Ornament



by the editorial staff

The exhibition The Clamor of Ornament: Exchange, Power, and Joy from the Fifteenth Century to the Present, curated by Emily King, Duncan Tomlin, and Margaret-Anne Logan, was held at the Drawing Center in New York from June 15 to September 18, 2022. The catalog, published by the Drawing Center as part of its “Drawing Papers” series, features contributions not only from the curators but also from Laura Hoptmann, Farshid Moussavi, Duro Olowu, and Shola von Reinhold, and is freely available at the following link:

https://drawingcenter.org/bookstore/editions/dp-149-the-clamor-of-ornament-regular#publication_reader

Held between June and September 2022 at the Drawing Center in New York – a cultural center with no permanent collection of its own, and therefore strongly committed to fostering relationships with lenders by focusing on the originality of its research themes – this exhibition explores the energetic power that ornamentation unleashes in the field of graphic art: from drawings on paper to engravings, illustrations, design, urban graffiti, and posters, without overlooking tattoos and other impromptu creations.

Given its compact scale, the intangible nature of the figurative invention,

and the absence of explicitly utilitarian aims, the graphic medium is the one best suited to justify the exhibition's uninhibited approach, free from excessive philological caution. The juxtapositions between works are not based on strict chronological or cultural affinities, but on the harmonies and dissonances that emerge from a direct viewing of the images. The libidinal charge, the ecstasy, the gratuitousness, the disinterest with which ideas and things are offered as gifts: this is the interpretation of the ornamental universe that the exhibition manages to convey – perhaps at the cost of some distortion, but with great communicative effectiveness. An interpretation that is not prejudiced by the distinction – which serves the disciplinary compartmentalization typical of university education but is often misleading on a cultural level – between Art with a capital “A” and the applied or decorative arts.

The works on display (approximately 200) span a time period from the 15th century to the present day and are deliberately presented without any evaluative hierarchy, in order to create the broadest possible spectrum of mutual influences. Thus, without interruption, one can move from Japanese designs for kosode (a smaller version of the better-known kimono) to Indian palampore textiles; from Albrecht Dürer's woodcuts inspired by Islamic knots (though we should note that our own Leonardo da Vinci also took on similar challenges) to designs for tapestries and wallpaper; from examples of contemporary creativity in the fields of pastry arts and fashion to images engraved by nineteenth-century whalers on pieces of ivory taken from the whales they caught; from the editorial graphics of past centuries to those of today, now fully digitized.

The catalog – itself a small work of art, designed and laid out with great sophistication – is out of print. However, it can be viewed, along with many other publications from the Drawing Center in New York, on the official website of this commendable institution dedicated to the study and promotion of graphic arts in every field of knowledge.

On the homepage: Wolfgang Hieronymus von Bömmel, Lion and Hare, engraving from the collection of gold-leaf ornamental motifs "Neueersonnene Gold-Schmieds Grillen", 1698, 12.7 x 20 cm, New York, Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum.

Below: one of the three original covers of the catalog.

