
Albrecht Dürer’s art occupies a position of significance in the history of the European imagination, most notably for epitomising the German Renaissance. Accordingly, the task of adding to the vast scholarship in existence is a daunting one. This explains the somewhat humble ambitions of the editors of this collection of essays – firstly, to ‘stimulate the reader to explore Dürer’s works from the perspective of cultural discourses which have seldom been regarded as intrinsic to Dürer’s interests’ (p. 2), and secondly, to focus on ‘images which provide important insights into an understanding of his cultural milieu’ (p. 2).

The collection covers four themes. It begins with an analysis of Dürer’s works in the context of particular aspects of contemporary culture in sixteenth century Germany. Dagmar Eichberger examines Dürer’s nature drawings and early collecting, Larry Silver looks at Germanic patriotism in the age of Dürer, and Wim Hüsken analyses the Michelfeldt Tapestry and contemporary European literature. Second, the collection examines Dürer’s works and their relationship with the viewer. Bob Scribner discusses ways of seeing in the age of Dürer and Charles Zika examines Dürer’s witch, riding women and the moral order. Third, the book returns to the theme of Dürer’s contemporary culture, this time focusing on its communal manifestations of love and censorship, with Lyndal Roper’s chapter entitled ‘Tokens of Affection: The Meanings of Love in Sixteenth-century Germany’ and Christine Andersson’s study of the censorship of images in Nuremberg between 1521 and 1527. The final two chapters deal with the lasting influence of Dürer’s ‘canon’ in Germany and Australia. Münch looks at changing German perceptions of the historical role of Dürer, while Zdanowicz traces the making of his collection in the National Gallery of Victoria.

Several articles are noteworthy. Silver explores how Dürer’s woodcuts, which accompanied the 1502 edition of Conrad Celtis’ Amores, depicted national iconography based on topoi redolent of classical authors such as Tacitus. Such images, together with his watercolour landscapes and military scenes, argues Silver, helped to shape a distinctive notion of Germanic past and identity, which was further developed in the works of Albrecht Altdorfer. This study is later complemented by Münch in his examination of the perception of Dürer’s works in the wider national and international context. In particular, Münch examines the führer-Dürer link which came to prominence in the imagery of the Third Reich. Zika’s study of Dürer’s engraving Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat seeks to understand a work which hitherto has resisted any widely accepted interpretation. Zika concludes it is a contribution to the developing visual language of witchcraft in its presentation of the image of a female riding figure.
which was intelligible to early sixteenth-century viewers as an inversion of the proper sexual order. As with many other articles, the reader’s appetite is whetted, rather than satisfied.

In addition to these cultural discourses, the book focuses on the images of Dürer, containing no fewer than eighty-seven illustrations, many of them full-page plates. Indeed, the book’s twenty-six centimetre format confirms that this is no token effort to synthesise visual and textual narrative. Minor blemishes include the introduction, which incorrectly refers to the ‘first chapter’ (p. 5), which in fact is chapter two. In addition, the choice of endnotes, rather than footnotes, to accompany the text proves inconvenient to the assiduous reader. Further, Irena Zdanowicz’s chapter lacks the depth of insight and analysis of the preceding chapters; and Andersson fails to make mention of Dürer in her chapter, while Roper and Scribner make but brief reference to the man, which is indeed perplexing in a collection devoted to Dürer. Perhaps this book may have benefited from a chapter dealing with the problems of methodology inherent in a work of this nature, in which the disciplines of history, art and literature come together.

This collection succeeds, however, in its modest ambitions to stimulate the reader to further explore the cultural discourse surrounding Dürer and increase understanding of the German master through his images. Indeed, given the quality of scholarship brought together by this collection, one wonders whether such ambitions may have been too modest?

JASON TALIADOROS
University of Melbourne

* * *


Between 1945 and 1952, Australia maintained a military force as a component of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF), part of the Allied Occupation of Japan. Australia’s role went beyond the purely military: Australians were active on several significant councils, commissions and tribunals relating to the occupation. It is surprising that so little scholarly research exists on this important period of Australia’s political, military and diplomatic history, and this dearth of work is reflected in the title of James Wood’s _The Forgotten Force: The Australian Military Contribution to the Occupation of Japan 1945-1952_. Wood’s book, his first, is essentially an empirical study of Australia’s military role as a participant in BCOF, of leading BCOF, and, after mid 1948, of