

*A Kingdom of Images: French Prints in the Age of Louis XIV, 1660–1715.*  
Peter Fuhring, Louis Marchesano, Rémi Mathis, and Vanessa Selbach, eds.  
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During the summer of 2015, the Getty Research Institute in association with the Bibliothèque nationale de France presented an exhibition of seventeenth-century French prints. According to Thomas Gaetgens, director of the Getty Institute, the exhibition filled a “gap in our knowledge” because it focused on the years of Louis XIV’s personal reign, from 1661 to 1715, a period much “richer and more complex” than previously recognized (ix). *A Kingdom of Images* is the catalogue that accompanied this exhibition. Edited by the curators, Peter Fuhring, Louis Marchesano, Rémi Mathis, and Vanessa Selbach, it is an oversized, lavishly illustrated volume that includes over 100 essays, most focused on individual prints. The 300-page catalogue begins with seven general, introductory essays by the curators/editors. These essays define the print, the printmaker, the print collector, the print market, and royal policy regarding prints. Louis Marchesano’s essay deals with the emergence of print criticism, which flourished in auction catalogues, dictionaries, salon reviews, and “countless

retrospective appreciations of individual engravers" (45). Debates focused on the artistic value of reproducing painting and the respective merits of engraving and etching.

Following this introductory section, *A Kingdom of Images* moves to the 210 exhibition prints, each of which is the subject of a short essay by a print authority. The prints are divided into eight categories according to what they depict: portraits of Louis XIV, architectural prints, decorative arts, the arts, the portrait, religious images, commemorations of important events, and "human nature." The intention of the curators was to reflect the variety of print production at the end of the seventeenth century. They have done an excellent job, including alongside well-known prints, like the king's portraits, neglected engravings depicting furniture and home decoration, jewelry, death notices, and even games.

Very large format images made from joining different engravings are one of the revelations of the book. Take, for example, Pierre Lepautre's "Façade of the Church of the Invalides" (cat. no. 18), which is bound in a book but folds out to 129 cm in height. Or Coquart's "Bird's Eye View of the Castle of Versailles" (cat. no. 20), which required six different copper plates and unfolds to 161.5 cm in length. Extremely large format prints also appear in the excellent chapter on religion. Religious prints constituted a large portion of Parisian print production and they varied in size and function. François Langot's "The Annunciation" (cat. no. 72) consists of nine sheets mounted on canvas measuring 229.5 x 161.5 cm. Such large formats (usually depicting crucifixes) were probably destined for group devotions. Another example is the print by an unknown printmaker entitled "Relapse" (cat. no. 77), one of a series depicting different states of diabolical temptation. The Jesuit missionary Huby used these images as visual aids when preaching to devout laymen gathered in Jesuit "retreat houses" in Brittany.

The penultimate section of *A Kingdom of Images* is entitled "Human Nature," a peculiar label for scenes of social life, both high and low, which fill this section. Allegories on marriage, depictions of street vendors in the *cris de Paris* genre, a well-dressed couple shopping, and evening amusements at Versailles: it is not clear what these prints have in common save that they focus on the social life of late seventeenth-century Paris. The volume ends with prints of events: royal entries, Versailles theatricals and banquets, Bourbon marriages and baptisms, battles, victories, and famines. Appropriately, the final print is a rare engraving of Louis XIV's funeral depicting his coffin lying in state at the royal abbey of Saint Denis (cat. no. 109). But the penultimate engraving is a rebus, a series of riddles that invites the viewer to determine from visual cues a dozen events that occurred in 1715, among them the king's death. This latter image is typical of the surprises to be found in *A Kingdom of Images*, a scholarly book that gives us a new appreciation of the variety and impact of the printed image in seventeenth-century France.

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