The Lettering of Prints (Paris, 17-18 Nov 16)

Paris, Centre André Chastel, Institut national d'histoire de l'art (INHA), Nov 17–18, 2016
Deadline: Mar 31, 2016

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The lettering of prints. Forms and functions of writing in the printed image in 16th-century Europe.

International Interdisciplinary Conference

Dates and place : Thursday and Friday November 17-18, 2016 at the Institut national d'Histoire de l'art (INHA), Paris.
Organization : Marianne Grivel and Emmanuel Lurin (Paris-Sorbonne university, Department of Archaeology and History of Art)

Papers submission : Proposals (title and summary of roughly 1000 characters, accompanied by a brief curriculum vitae, should be addressed before Thursday March 31, 2016 to the following addresses:

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Presentation of the conference :
Words, titles, legends, commentaries, artists' names, privileges - necessarily - fine speeches, addresses to the "reader", showy dedications. Cursive and typographic writing, large and small typefaces, ligatures, numbers and measures. Added words, associated with figures or set apart by a frame, words that one notices, that one watches, that one sometimes discovers within an image… What if prints were also a question of words, of written composition, of comparative reading within the written and figurative space of an image?

Before the relationship between artistic creation and writing was completely rethought by the avant-gardists, prints were long the only visual art in which words could be freely associated with figures and in which the parts of the text, inserted in the composition, could form a visual, logical and semantic whole with the drawing. This capacity of prints to accommodate within a single graphical composition a great variety of signs, forms and written material is primarily due to the conception of printing plates and to the technical properties of engraving. At a time when a mimetic conception of representation which led more often than not to the exclusion of text from the figurative field of the image was becoming widespread in Europe - painted, inscribed or drawn text often relegated to the margins, hidden in a detail or set apart by a frame - prints continued to accommodate words, to draw texts to figures, to include inscriptions in the very composition of engraved plates. During the Renaissance, professionals of the genre showed remarkable wit and

inventiveness in the artistic conception of writing, the articulation of graphic registers and the complementarity of written and figurative languages which generally make up the printed image.

From this point of view, prints occupy a very specific place in artistic production, visual culture and practices of writing in modern Western society. We may even see in them the possibility of bringing together in a single medium different forms of expression and dialogue which were always deeply connected in the Middle Ages, which is one of the reasons behind the economic success of prints and their rapid assimilation by European society. For all those who needed both written resources and images, prints offered a new medium, itself a subtle intermediary between printed text and drawing. The 16th century in Europe was not only the golden age of the printed book: it also marked the application of engraving techniques to all sorts of iconographies, the introduction of printed images in numerous spheres of activity, as well as the birth, derivative of prints, of a new social practice of images.

The goal of the conference is to study the place of writing, its forms and functions in 16th-century prints, from the production of images to their use in extremely varied socio-cultural contexts. The propositions of presenters, whether dedicated to specific corpuses or treating the question in a more cross-sectional manner, should be founded on consultation of engraved or etched inscriptions which constitute the "lettering" of prints; on technical, linguistic and iconographic analysis of these inscriptions in relationship to the images they accompany; on historical interpretation of the objects, processes and artistic and cultural phenomena thus brought to light. We invite specialists in prints to widen their scope by taking into consideration objects and inquiries from other disciplines: literary history, history of the book, history of science (from medicine to cartography via antiquarian studies), religious history or political history may all contribute to collective thinking on the place of writing in the conception and use of printed images in the 16th century.

Proposed themes for presentations:
- The lettering and the printmaker: is there a technique of writing in the printed images of the Renaissance?
- How and why are images designed? The conception of the title, its function and uses in prints.
- Signatures, addresses and privileges: affirmation of the "name" (of the artist, printmaker, publisher, printer) and its signification in prints.
- Texts with or without frames? The conception of frontispieces, commentaries and legends.
- Readings, functions, uses: what knowledge of the lettering contributes to the historical comprehension of printed images.
- The address to the "reader": appeal to the client, promotion of the artist or author, dialogue with the spectator and reader.
- The place of commentary, its literary form and its function within the printed image.
- The cartographic lettering: seeing and describing the world in the Renaissance (maps, views, maps of the world).
- The poetic lettering: poems, couplets, dedications, emblems in the 16th-century printed image.
- The religious lettering: the functions of writing in 16th-century religious images, teaching and devotional practices.
- The political lettering: images and dissemination of propaganda in the 16th-century European print.

NB: The conference proceedings will be published (language of publication : French and English).

Reference:

CFP: The Lettering of Prints (Paris, 17-18 Nov 16). In: ArtHist.net, Feb 20, 2016 (accessed Nov 18, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/12266>.