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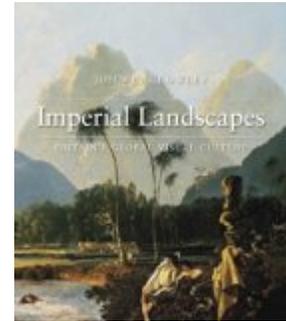
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

John Crowley. *Imperial Landscapes: Britain's Global Visual Culture, 1745-1820*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011. Illustrations. 320 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-17050-4.

Reviewed by John McAleer (University of Southampton)

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Britain's overseas colonies, military endeavors, and commercial interests inspired a plethora of visual responses in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this impressively researched and engagingly written book, John Crowley explores one particular aspect of this visual engagement with the wider world: the representation, reproduction, and reception of landscape images. The subject is introduced with a discussion of the growing domestic British interest in visual representations: the number of political prints published per annum increased from about twenty at the beginning of the eighteenth century to over one hundred by the middle of the century. Following the contours of Britain's political and military fortunes, these subjects became increasingly "imperial" in nature. A greater number of oil paintings led to more prints being produced, as Britain became a "net exporter" of art (p. 4), and the British engagement with the rest of the world was increasingly played out in visual terms.

Chapters are arranged on a continent-by-continent basis, illustrating how artists, cartographers, and surveyors represented the regions of the world being opened up to British eyes at this time. Landscape art in particular made it possible for British people "to reassure themselves that they understood distant and/or previously unfamiliar lands ... by visiting them in their visual imaginations" (p. 8). Crowley makes a convincing argument for seeing the British visual engagement with the rest of the world in global terms, closely entwined with the political development of the British Empire. After the successes of the Seven Years' War, he contends, British interests became global as activities in one oceanic or continental sphere crucially affected the others. In this period,

British landscapes were being created *simultaneously* on a global scale: in the British Isles and overseas. Through a combination of textual evidence and in-depth visual analysis, the reader is persuaded that landscape depiction and description were increasingly deployed as ways of understanding and incorporating the diverse regions of the empire.

Crowley has built his study on sound foundations. Partially as a result of the pioneering scholarship of Bernard Smith, the British engagement with the Pacific through the medium of landscape depiction is widely known. In the period discussed here, Pacific spaces became vividly visual to Europeans through the work of peripatetic artists, like Sydney Parkinson, William Hodges, and John Webber. These artists, and many others besides, disseminated the results of voyages of exploration through the naturalistic representation of unfamiliar places, bringing a whole region of the globe—hitherto scantily known—to the attention of British people.

As Crowley makes clear, however, Britain's global vision was not confined to the Pacific. In addition to his scenes of the South Seas, Hodges exhibited eight Indian landscapes at the Royal Academy in 1786. And the engagement and interest of the British public in the subcontinent is further indicated by the success of *Oriental Scenery*—a series of prints based on the work of Thomas and William Daniell, who were also itinerant artists. In yet another corner of the empire, a classically trained artist, George Robertson, was employed to paint picturesque landscapes in Jamaica. After he returned to England in 1775, Robertson published a series of six engravings based on his views of William Beckford's Roar-

ing River estate, in which he portrayed Jamaica as a classical, Claudian landscape redolent of the Roman *campagna*. Crowley supports his reading of these images by citing a book written by Beckford. In this, the Caribbean plantation owner attempted to evoke his readers' admiration for Jamaican scenery by making analogies with classic scenes of the European picturesque.

But landscape depictions need not necessarily involve high art. Inspiring a range of oil paintings for exhibition at the Royal Academy, James Cook's travels also led to the production of such diverse visual material as wallpaper and stage scenery. In another example, Elizabeth Posthuma Simcoe presented thirty-two scenes of the Canadas painted on birch bark to George III. And, on a much grander physical scale, Robert Ker Porter's 230-square-meter, 37-meter-wide panorama of "The Storming of Seringapatam" brought Indian landscape—and Britain's military and imperial interest in it—to London audiences when it was exhibited at the Lyceum on the Strand in 1799.

One of the most intractable problems in discussing the representation of the British Empire is that of public reception: how did audiences respond to such scenes? Surviving data generally do not allow us to draw any firm conclusions but the scope and volume of production would suggest that interest was high. Crowley provides some anecdotal evidence to support this. We learn, for example, that Hodges's landscapes inspired Matthew Boulton to buy some Tahitian landscape depictions and send them for reproduction. While the prints comprising the Daniells' *Oriental Scenery* were expensive, they sold well: the whole series cost two hundred guineas, with prints being sold in pairs every two months. Simply finishing the series, which took over a dozen years to complete, testified to subscribers' interest, patience, and satisfaction. Four years after completing the luxury edition, the Daniells began publishing a reduced-size version, selling for a tenth of the price,

which also sold well and had a second printing.

The book's scope and ambition are to be welcomed. Of course, in such a wide-ranging discussion, it is inevitable that some areas are glossed over. The omission of Africa, however, seems strange, given its status as a crucial part of both Britain's Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds. By the same token, it is important to recognize that British visual engagements with the rest of the world were not confined solely to the period discussed here. Instructions to those aboard English voyages in the late sixteenth century, for example, called for representations according to European traditions of natural history illustration. William Dampier's voyages in HMS *Roebuck* at the turn of the eighteenth century, recounted in *Voyage to New Holland* (1703), included "a person skilled in Drawing" (p. 78). And, as Crowley readily acknowledges, landscape depiction not only was an aesthetic prerogative but was also often employed to fulfill a need for information about newly acquired territories. William Petty's Down Survey of Ireland (1655–56), William Roy's Military Survey of Scotland (1747–55), Colin Mackenzie's Great Mysore Survey of India (1799–1810), and William Lambton and George Everest's Great Trigonometrical Survey of India (1802–43), all bear testament to this impulse of recording and describing landscape features.

Through its breadth of vision and depth of coverage, this book integrates various cultures of landscape depiction and representation, providing a uniquely global perspective on this phenomenon. And in doing so, *Imperial Landscapes* enriches our understanding of the development of the British Empire, its impact on British culture, and the ways in which imperial activities in diverse and disparate regions of the globe were connected. As we have come to expect from Yale University Press, the book is lavishly produced. The range of illustrations—269 in total, many of which are in color—assist the author in bringing Britain's global landscapes vividly to life.

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