

José Ramón Marcaida López

Arte y ciencia en el barroco español. Seville: Fundación Focus Abengoa; Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2014. Pp. 337. Hb, 27 euros.

The recipient of the International Award named in honor of the art historian Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, José Ramón Marcaida López has made an important contribution to scholarship on two fronts. He not only delves into the complex question of how scientific study emerged in Spain during the early modern period, but shows how the pursuit and dissemination of this type of knowledge should not necessarily be considered as something separate from or in opposition to the flourishing of Baroque culture and the importance of visual display in the Catholic empire of the Spanish Habsburgs. In the words of the author, this book aims not to define a “Baroque science,” but to “set the scene” for what should be deemed a “science of the Baroque”—the intellectual pursuit of knowledge about the natural world set within the cultural aesthetics of early modern Spain (26). Therefore, readers of this book will find that both artistic expression and the birth of modern science in the Hispanic context are described in terms of “asombro” [wonder], “ser y parecer” [reality and illusion], and “desengaño” [disillusionment], three of the most prominent themes in the seventeenth century (61, 73, 259).

One of the strengths of this book is that Marcaida immediately takes readers beyond the common misunderstanding that scientific inquiry during the Spanish Baroque be seen in the context of either the “Black Legend” or Spain’s “Golden Age” (26). Embracing this paradox, he weaves together several figures, who at first might not seem to be related, but whose intellectual and artistic activities meet and complement each other on several fronts. Natural philosophers, explorers of the New World, and collectors of oddities, along with writers, painters, engravers, printers, and priests come together to form the mosaic of a larger, more complex, picture. One figure to appear throughout is the Jesuit Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (1595–1658), who serves as the common thread running through the book (279). Indeed, this focus is another strength of the book: Nieremberg has only recently begun to be fully appreciated and explored by Hispanists and scholars of the Counter-Reformation in Spain.

From the mid-1620s until his death, Nieremberg was a prominent intellectual, writer, and polymath in the Spanish capital. As Marcaida points out, he was the first to hold the chair of natural history in the Society’s Colegio Imperial in Madrid, and the author of several books widely disseminated in Spain and throughout Europe during the seventeenth century and later (29). Marcaida

gives special attention to two of Nieremberg's best known works: his encyclopedic tome on the flora and fauna of the New World, *Historia naturae, maxime peregrinae* (Antwerp: Officina Plantiniana, 1635), and his famous ascetical treatise *De la diferencia entre lo temporal y eterno* (Madrid: María de Quiñones, 1640). On the one hand Marcaida compares Nieremberg to his Jesuit companion and German contemporary Athanasius Kircher, renowned natural philosopher of the Jesuit college in Rome, but on the other hand, shows how Nieremberg relates to author Miguel de Mañara (*Discurso de la verdad* [1671], Seville: Luis Bexinez y Castilla, 1778) and painter Juan de Valdés Leal (*Jeroglíficos de nuestras postrimerías*, 1672), whose portrayal of the material world in terms and images of death and decay echo, and likely are influenced by, Nieremberg's ascetical spirituality (117, 274–76).

Through the figure of Nieremberg, Marcaida describes how Spain's fascination with the discovery of things in the New World, the collection and study of natural objects, and the interpretation and display of this knowledge directly relate to the gallery paintings, still-life portraiture, and *vanitas* images in the seventeenth century. In addition to Kircher and Nieremberg, individual Jesuits receive mention throughout the book, such as natural historian José de Acosta, writer Antonio Possevino, and painter Daniel Seghers, and the many references to members of Society of Jesus and their corporate contribution to both the arts and the sciences in Spain and the rest of Europe during the Baroque period perhaps deserves more exploration.

Arte y ciencia is divided into three longer chapters, but they are well organized and the author keeps the attention of readers by creating several sections and subsections. The fifty-six color images that accompany the text are referenced throughout, and further enhance Marcaida's treatment of the subject matter. Chapter one, "Accumulation," examines the importance that was given to the collection of items in the late sixteenth century and well into the seventeenth. It begins by drawing our attention to the creation and development of *pinturas de gabinete* (gallery paintings) and *bodegones* (still-life paintings), then establishes a parallel to how the Spanish court and people of influence sought to accumulate things coming to Europe from the New World. Kircher and Nieremberg fit into this picture as natural philosophers, the first by collecting curious objects for his famous museum, the second by collecting information for his texts. Each one represents in his own way the dissemination of knowledge.

In chapter two, "Representation," Marcaida examines the ways in which objects, images, and information of the New World were visually displayed. The type of display that was given to an item determined the information, or knowledge, that was meant to be shared. Here the author distinguishes between the

empirical and objective portrayal of items, giving them the value of “faithful testimony,” and the “analytical style” that was developed, allowing artists to detail aspects of an image they deemed most relevant without necessarily foregoing objectivity (149–50). The attention given in this chapter to the authorship of the seventy images in Nieremberg’s *Historia naturae* is a valuable contribution to the complex history surrounding the design and compilation of this tome (170–80).

Chapter three, “Preservation,” connects the handling of natural objects to the wider context of the Baroque and its preoccupation with the fleeting, or ephemeral, nature of things. Nieremberg once again figures prominently in this chapter for two reasons. First, for the interpretation he gives to natural things and their religious significance as part of God’s creation, and, second, for the dissemination of *De la diferencia* with its focus on the death and decay of all created things. Marcaida draws a parallel between still-life and *vanitas* paintings, each in its own right a realistic, although rhetorical, portrayal of the natural world.

With *Arte y ciencia*, Marcaida successfully achieves his goal of describing the complex and multilayered interactions that occurred between two important aspects of early modern European culture. Equally significant, he clearly demonstrates the need for further explorations of the protagonists, their motives, and the themes related to the dissemination of scientific knowledge in the Hispanic context.

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