

Pointing toes and falling hair:

crossing the margin between image and text in late sixteenth-century prints

The juxtaposition of image and text became the usual layout of single sheet prints in the second half of the sixteenth century. This paper looks at some examples from Rome and Antwerp to examine how the visual unity of text and image was achieved in certain prints with the help of a special expressive device, through the interaction of image and text.

Meyer Schapiro defined any crossing of visual thresholds as an expressive device used in order to make the image more effective, dynamic, and moving. According to him, when elements of the image cross the frame of the depiction, the figure becomes more lively and energetic in the eye of the beholder. If the image is extended beyond its margins, the spatial and illusionistic relations of image, frame, and the spectator undergo a change (Schapiro 1972-1973). In some sixteenth-century prints, margin crossings were not only applied to exhibit the artistic talent of designer and printmaker. Body parts of printed figures left the illusionistic world of the depiction in order to establish a close connection with texts placed on the other side of the margins. These crossings enabled a witty interaction between image and text that could enrich the meaning of the whole sheet. For example, it could be a metaphor for the crossing of the border between different realities.

The meaningful interaction of image and text also highlights the unity of text and image that was more and more characteristic of single sheet print publishing in the second half of the sixteenth century. Crossing the margins meant leaving the world of the image, and entering a different register of the illusionistic reality of the print that was closer to the viewer. Pointing toes drew the spectator's attention to certain details of the print. In order to communicate with the audience, the figures seemingly left their own reality and entered the world of the viewer, involving the beholder into the depiction. In my paper, I attempt to expand on the importance of this changing relationship of image, text, and audience.

The analysed prints were published in two major European centers of single sheet printmaking, Antwerp and Rome. They were created by the leading professional publishers of mid-sixteenth century, Antonio Salamanca, Antonio Lafreri, and Hieronymus Cock. Through the topic of crossing the margin, this paper also expands on the potential cultural and artistic exchange within the international business of printmaking. Mobile paper objects ensured the dissemination of ideas in the sixteenth century, creating a common European way of reading and viewing prints. Being able to read both the visual and the textual parts of the prints, and appreciate the interaction of image and text was an important part of print culture.