

from literary scholars and cultural historians. What, for example, are the implications of natural emblems on the history of gender and sexuality? Do natural emblems become a sort of shorthand in other genres; for instance, can they explain something like the bear in *The Winter's Tale: Emblems and the Natural World*, with its painstakingly researched essays and gorgeous and plentiful full-color illustrations, will surely inspire new growth in the field of emblem studies and further research into the complex literary and artistic symbolism of the natural world.

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*The Ivory Mirror: The Art of Mortality in Renaissance Europe*. Stephen Perkinson. With Naomi Speakman, Katherine Baker, Elizabeth Morrison, and Emma Maggie Solberg. Exh. Cat. Brunswick, ME: Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 2017. 280 pp. \$50.

*The Ivory Mirror* is an alarmingly handsome book about death. Five richly illustrated articles explore the cultural history of the memento mori in relation to premodern anxieties about death as well as the individual's preparation for its inevitability. The volume was produced with great attention to both scholarship and design as a catalogue for an exhibition that took place at Bowdoin College Museum of Art (24 June 2017 to 26 November 2017). Stephen Perkinson curated the show and edited this admirable catalogue, which draws on nine works from the museum's collection, supplemented by fifty-two objects borrowed from numerous collaborating institutions.

Perkinson's eponymous essay opens *The Ivory Mirror* with a detailed description of the embodied experience—at once sensual, aesthetic, and spiritual—of handling a sixteenth-century ivory chaplet featuring intricately carved three-sided prayer beads with the faces of young women and men interlinked with skulls. A centerpiece of the exhibition, on loan from the British Museum, it complements a double-faced ivory memento mori prayer bead acquired by Bowdoin in 2011 (Naomi Speakman's essay on the collecting histories of memento mori beads provides some perspective for this acquisition). Perkinson positions these works against late medieval French literary traditions such as the *miroir salutaire* and *danse macabre*, at one chronological end, and early modern anatomical illustrations, at the other. In another contribution to the catalogue, Emma Maggie Solberg supplements this visual analysis with a consideration of medieval poetic traditions in which death comes suddenly and (as academics and curators know all too well), "Death comes as a bureaucrat" (234).

While scholars have previously explained these objects in relation to the effects of the Black Death in the fourteenth century, the authors in *The Ivory Mirror* situate them in

the historical context of the late fifteenth century, at a moment when an increasingly global economy flush with new resources from all corners of the world coincided with shifting notions of identity that led to, among other things, a rethinking of selfhood. Moving into the sixteenth century, shifting religious, philosophical, and artistic practices were especially fraught in the North (the focus of this volume), where, even as the adherents of different forms of Protestantism scorned the abuse of images in ecclesiastical contexts, they did not necessarily chastise the consumption of luxury objects in the secular, intimate sphere. Lavish, costly objects, like the more humble medium of the written word, could be mobilized as vehicles for prayer and self-reflection in anticipation of death. The paraphernalia used within this economy of preemptive penance cover a wide range of types and materials, including intricately carved ivory prayer beads; devotional images painted on vellum and parchment; black-and-white engravings and chiaroscuro woodcuts that appear on broadsheets, in treatises on the art of dying well, and on collectible prints; portraits in oil on wood and canvas; and small carved figurines in boxwood, bone, horn, and precious metals. Elizabeth Morrison's essay focuses on late medieval illuminated manuscripts and the role that such personal prayer books played in shaping the reader's coming to terms with and preparation for the end. Katherine Baker's essay considers the activity of an early sixteenth-century French sculptor, Chicart Bailly, to whom six minute ivory carvings from various international collections have been reattributed here. Among these is a memento mori sculpture of a skeleton in a tomb (pl. 40). The horrific depiction of the maggot-ridden cadaver in a state of advanced decay is offset by the elaborate triangle tile pattern rendered in exquisitely cut ivory and ebony, framed by six small figural columns (discussed by Baker). A final word must be said to commend the designers at Lucia|Marquand and Yale University Press. To read *The Ivory Mirror* is to be in the study, the classroom, and the gallery at once. Sixty-one plates present the objects in the exhibition against crisp, black backgrounds, which are positioned at the center of the book, dividing the scholarly articles in half. Viewed from the side, the juxtaposition of the white and black pages of the catalogue reads like the memento mori sculpture described above. Moreover, the reader is confronted from the start by the blank expression of an embossed white skull, emerging in bas relief from the ivory-colored surface of the hardcover, re-creating the tactile experience of holding the ivory chaplet, which is so evocatively described in the first lines of Perkinson's introduction. Form merges with content and vice versa. *Sic transit gloria mundi!* The world's glory might be ephemeral, but art and scholarship—as *The Ivory Mirror* demonstrates—transcend death.

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