

Romantic Spain: David Roberts and Genaro Pérez Villaamil. By Claudia Hopkins. Madrid: Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, CEEH, and Instituto Ceán Bermúdez, 2021. Pp. 512. €43.27 (hardback). ISBN 9788418760037.

Dedicating an exhibition to two artists presents specific challenges: justifying the double focus, balancing the content to deal proportionately with each artist, and managing a large volume of material. The present catalog, which complements the exhibition at the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid (October 7, 2021–January 16, 2022), succeeds admirably on all these counts. It is the first project to explore in depth the interrelations between Scottish artist David Roberts (1796–1864) and Spanish artist Genaro Pérez Villaamil (1807–1854), and their joint contribution to the image of “Romantic Spain” through their topographical and architectural representations. Its major scholarly achievement is the deployment of an impressive range of sources—including artists’ correspondence and pieces of tableware printed with Roberts’ Spanish scenes—to dissect nineteenth-century notions of Spanishness and its representation both within Spain and without.

Exhibition curator Claudia Hopkins wrote the introduction and the following four essays, while Matilde Mateo and Andrew Ginger provided the final two chapters. The meticulously-researched catalog, which comprises many objects rarely exhibited or fully researched before, is the work of Hopkins and Mateo, as well as Antonio Gámiz Gordo, Antonio Jesús García Ortega, Celia Jiménez Bellido, Briony Llewellyn, Krystyna Matyjeszkiewicz, Luis Ruiz Padrón, Carlos Sánchez Díez, Daniella Smith and Martin P. Sorowka.

There is an impeccable coherence in the content and sequence of the essays that is particularly rare in exhibition catalogs dedicated to more than one artist. Although most of the essays are thematic and can be enjoyed independently, reading the book in order also allows the reader to follow the careers of both artists chronologically, gaining a deeper understanding of their wider contributions. The catalog entries appear after each essay or thematic section.

Hopkins’s introductory essay discusses the rationale behind the exhibition and sketches out the themes explored subsequently. Crucially, it critically examines the nature of the oft-mentioned link between the more mature Roberts and his younger Spanish admirer, opting for the term “dialogue” while highlighting potential problems with the notion of artistic influence. A biographical outline is provided of both artists, leading up to their meeting in 1833.

The second essay, “Seville, Summer 1833,” details Roberts’s extended trip to Spain in that year, reconstructing his encounter with Villaamil by combining the limited textual evidence with several compelling visual parallels between the artists’ works. Particularly striking is the similarity between their paintings of Alcalá de Guadaíra at dusk. Hopkins speculates that the pair visited the town together, but whether they sketched the view side-by-side, or whether Villaamil copied Roberts, is a point on which she maintains an open mind (the authors of the catalog entry consider Villaamil’s rendition a “painstaking copy” (82)). Hopkins convincingly concludes that, even at this point of closest contact between them, the Spanish artist did not blindly assimilate Roberts’s style or subject matter.

The third essay presents both artists as key figures in the invention and popularization of the “Spanish Picturesque” through their post-1833 work, with Roberts taking the lead. Roberts’s approach to Spain is revealed to have been solidly rooted in aesthetic theories of the Picturesque, and tinged with the anti-Catholic attitudes typical in Britain at the time, while Villaamil responded with his own version that portrayed Catholicism in a positive

light. A key strength here is the careful attention to the interrelation between text and image. Roberts provided illustrations for the four-volume travelogue *The Tourist in Spain* (1835–1838), with texts by the Englishman Thomas Roscoe, while Villaamil teamed up with the Spanish writer Patricio de la Escosura to produce *España artística y monumental* (1842–1850). By considering Escosura's texts alongside Villaamil's lithographs, Hopkins demonstrates that the Spanish publication deliberately corrected foreign clichés of Spain and aimed to expose foreign tourists as naïve.

Further significant differences between Roberts's and Villaamil's image of Spain are uncovered in Hopkins' remaining two essays, on orientalism and historical fantasy. "Al-Andalus to the East" is a nuanced examination of the role of artistic representations of Spain's Islamic past in the conceptualization of European and Spanish identities. Particularly interesting is the suggestion that Roberts's distorted representations of Islamic-era buildings responded to the theory that Gothic architecture was derived from Saracenic architecture. Roberts's vision of Spain is revealed as firmly Andalusia-centric; his fascination with the Alhambra, and his significant role in popularizing it in the Western imagination, are contrasted sharply with Villaamil's muted interest in the building.

The fifth essay, "The Past as a National Fantasy," explores how Villaamil's work deliberately shifted the attention *away* from Andalusia with its Islamic heritage and *towards* Northern Spain and Castile with its Christian history and architecture. The ambition of *España artística y monumental* was, Hopkins shows, "to popularize an image of their country [...] based on the entwined histories of the monarchy and the Church, notions of chivalry and piety, and the Reconquista" (295). In his imaginative renditions of architecture, Villaamil prioritized the Gothic style because it was considered a sublime Christian achievement and the perfect architectural expression of Christianity.

Fundamental questions regarding manipulation, exaggeration, and inaccuracy in both artists' work arise throughout the book. These are tackled head-on in the sixth essay; Matilde Mateo's fascinating exploration of truthfulness and the imagination in relation to John Ruskin's theories and Romantic philosophy. Focusing on Roberts's and Villaamil's depictions of Gothic cathedrals, Mateo demonstrates that the distortions they introduced—exaggerated dimensions, irregularity of form, and unrealistic viewpoints—were rooted in a "typically Romantic visuality" in which the Gothic cathedral was felt to be "the most sublime and picturesque of all human creations" and something to be experienced aesthetically and spiritually, rather than visually dissected (327–30). Her compelling argument that distortions could impart profound truth to the Romantic eye has relevance far beyond this study.

Recent and historical photographs are introduced occasionally in the catalog to highlight how artists departed from objective reality in their representations. This particular section includes a work by Villaamil possibly derived from a daguerreotype he took of Pamplona Cathedral, as the catalog entry implies; surprisingly, however, the implications of photography as a new artistic medium are not addressed in the accompanying essays.

Andrew Ginger's closing essay "Looking Forward" neatly combines an examination of both artists' attention to modern technology and "progress" in their later years with a discussion of their artistic legacies. Ginger demonstrates that both Villaamil and Roberts deliberately associated their respective monarchies with technology in their paintings (though only Villaamil's Spanish-themed works show the country as forward-looking). Particularly suggestive is the argument that Villaamil's peculiar compositions, use of optics and mixed styles in such paintings invite viewers to "contemplate the relationship between the recent technologies and the ancient landscape of Spain" (418).

Romantic Spain has immense scholarly merit. It is more than a sum of its parts, for through Roberts and Villaamil broader notions of Spanishness and its representation are

scrutinized, often from new angles. The book is also a visual delight, beautifully presented and copiously illustrated with high quality images.

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