

PART VI

VISUAL ARTS

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If we want to understand English visual culture in Shakespeare's time on its own terms rather than our own, we must eschew art history's long-standing obsession with classicism, genius, "high" art, and even naturalism as it is normally defined. Shakespeare's contemporaries saw things differently. The distinctions we are used to making between easel painting and other, supposedly lesser, forms of picturing barely existed. A "picture" meant not only an oil painting on panel or canvas but also a miniature, sculpture, tapestry, heraldry, embroidery, or marquetry. It could even mean a theatrical event. Value, moreover, was determined far more by materials than by the maker. Tapestries woven from costly wools or silks, and which often incorporated silver and gold threads, were a great deal more expensive than any painting from the period. Finally, England did not experience the cult of the artistic genius that inspired Italian books such as Vasari's *Lives*. English inventories rarely name the artists responsible for pictures in oil, listing the subject and the size of a work rather than the name of the person who created it. In doing so, we are well rewarded, for we uncover a richly plural visual culture, which, although undeniably idiosyncratic in certain respects, was international in scope.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- English visual culture on its own terms
- Trajectories
- Flourishing of the "applied" arts
- Religious contexts
- Social and economic contexts
- Politics and the representation of status
- The status of artists
- Formats/forms/functions
- Varieties of painting
- Foreign relations
- Objects beyond borders

51. ORNAMENT

Russ McDonald, Goldsmiths College, University of London, United Kingdom

The visual culture of early modern England was grounded in the pleasures of pattern and decoration, a taste that became more pervasive and urgent as the sixteenth century drew to its end. The decorative predilections of the early Tudors attest to a culture in transition, a realm whose art was devoted on the one hand to familiar images and configurations that we would call medieval and on the other to emerging modes of expression that seem recognizably to belong to the Renaissance. The love of ornament among Shakespeare's contemporaries can be witnessed in a variety of media – including literature. Alliteration, parallelism, and rhyme could please the ear just as visual ornament pleased the eye.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Architecture
- Material objects
- Clothing
- Writing
- Shakespeare's versions of ornament

52. SINGLE-SHEET PRINTS

Malcolm Jones, University of Sheffield, United Kingdom

None of Shakespeare's works contains the word "print" in the sense of a picture or design made from an inked impression of an engraved metal plate or wooden block, but references in Shakespeare's plays and poems show he and his audiences and readers were thoroughly familiar with single-sheet prints. Only recently have historians of early modern English culture begun to recognize the presence and influence of native and foreign single-sheet prints circulating in the capital and, via itinerant peddlers like Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, in the countryside. By the time of Shakespeare's death, the English print repertoire was expanding rapidly, with many "subject" prints being issued in the 1620s and a positive deluge of illustrated books and pamphlets being issued during the English civil war era, after the collapse of the censorship system.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Subjects common to both prints and plays
- Pornographic prints
- Imported prints
- Broadside ballads
- Prints and politics
- Trick pictures
- Portraits

53. EMBLEMS

Charles Moseley, Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom

A miniature artistic form that combines words and pictures in a complex, interdependent, and often ambiguous way, emblems were a favorite Renaissance way of conceptualizing abstractions. From the mid-sixteenth to the mid-eighteenth century, there was what amounted to a craze for emblems. Books of emblems proliferated across Europe. Emblems also affected furniture design, tapestry, painting, and even building decoration – and also, more importantly, how people actually thought, wrote, and acted. Shakespeare frequently exploits the dramatic potential in emblems' combination of words and pictures.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- "Emblem" as a genre
- The philosophical background
- A survey of landmark emblem books
- Five ways of reading emblems
- Sources and development
- Shakespeare's uses of emblems in his plays

54. ARCHITECTURE

Lena Cowen Orlin, Georgetown University, United States

In Elizabethan and Jacobean England, the landmark achievements in the visual arts were architectural. Painting, sculpture, garden design, and decorative objects were regarded at the time as accessories to monumental "prodigy houses." The very idea of building as an art of design can be traced to the time of Shakespeare. For the first time, named architects emerge as the designers of the grandest of these projects. Even so, they had to reconcile architectural ideas from Italy and France with medieval traditions and dispositions of domestic space peculiar to England.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Builders and projects
- Architects or "devisers"
- Heritage and the great hall
- Selective appropriation from classical and continental models
- New ideas and new rooms
- Symbolic exteriors

- The shift in fashion from courtyard houses to compact houses
- “Spatial thought” in everyday life

55. GARDENS

Paula Henderson, independent scholar, United Kingdom

Although very few gardens from the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries survived sweeping changes in taste in the eighteenth century and later, new archaeological methods, the discovery of detailed estate maps, and a better understanding of how much actually survives in the form of earthworks and garden buildings have revealed just how expansive, colorful, and imaginative Tudor and early Stuart gardens were. In these spaces, the Elizabethan and Jacobean love of ornament, pattern, “conceit,” and “device” were achieved on the largest possible scale.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Tudor garden designs
- Jacobean garden designs
- Gardens just outside the city of London
- Uses of gardens for retreats, private conversations, and theatrical entertainments
- Plants and meanings of gardens
- Statues of Shakespeare as garden ornaments

56. SCULPTURE

Nigel Llewellyn, The Tate, United Kingdom

Images carved in stone were certainly available to be seen in Shakespeare’s England, but “sculpture” was not a recognized cultural category. In fact, sculpture’s purpose was contested, and individual sculptures, especially works on religious subjects, were sometimes damaged on the grounds that they were images or idols that were a danger to the godly. Likenesses on tombs and monuments were an exception. Away from places of worship, there was a great deal of decorative and ornamental sculpture, especially in well-to-do houses.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Sculpture as an unstable category
- The status of sculpture and the other visual arts circa 1600
- Sculpture as a trade practiced by immigrants from the Low Countries
- Patronage
- Noted carvers
- The emergence of native English sculptors
- Materials and contracts
- Sculpture in Shakespeare’s plays and poems
- Shakespeare’s monument in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon
- The beginnings of “art history” in the seventeenth century

57. PAINTING ON WOODEN PANEL

Karen Hearn, independent scholar, United Kingdom

Anglophone readers who are familiar with the sonnets written by Shakespeare and his contemporaries know that they have to work out how to decode these highly artificial and precise constructs. Present-day viewers need to be prepared to understand paintings of this period in the same way. It is useful to understand the nature of the problems – many of them physical ones – that can get in the way of an accurate understanding of the original nature and purpose of a painted image.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- The prominence of portrait painting
- Wood as the primary support for painting in England
- Cues for viewing

- Artists from abroad
- Taking the queen's likeness
- Self-portraiture
- Merchant-class customers
- Painters to nobility
- Painting under James I
- Some notable collections of paintings
- Patterns of display

58. DECORATIVE ARTS

Anthony Wells-Cole, independent scholar, United Kingdom

What we know today as the decorative arts – that is, architectural decoration and the furnishings of houses – can tell us, as no other single source of information can, about what Shakespeare's contemporaries looked at in their everyday lives, what they read, what they thought about. Evidence survives in inventories, wills, and contracts as well as in a wealth of surviving interiors and objects in country houses.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Decor and decorum in Bess of Hardwick's houses
- Favorite subjects and motifs
- Designs for silver plate
- Living amid scenes from the Bible
- Cosmological images
- Figures of the Virtues
- Scenes from classical mythology
- Emblems
- Decoration down the social scale

59. TAPESTRIES

Sheila ffolliott, George Mason University, United States

Textiles of all kinds played a major role in English Renaissance culture. They were objects of great prestige and yet portable. In effect, they provided instant majesty. Among textiles, tapestry was the most prized. It, not painting, served as the principal vehicle for the presentation of large-scale visual narratives. It is difficult for the modern viewer to recapture the stunning effect that tapestry produced in an early modern setting: the impact of large, colorful panoramas enveloping great halls or long galleries or lining a processional route outdoors. Up close, viewers could observe details selectively, in the evenings by candlelight that would flicker and pick out the surfaces and metallic highlights.

Topics covered in this chapter include

TERMS FOR TAPESTRY

- Production methods
- Value
- Production in England
- Subject matter
- Format
- Tapestries as forms of conspicuous consumption
- Display, and use in the theater

60. PAINTED CLOTHS

Nicholas Mander, independent scholar, United Kingdom

Painted cloths were a familiar feature of the Elizabethan domestic interior and were adapted on a large scale for widespread functions in urban contexts. As such, they played a key part in the dynamics of the early modern experience of

private and public spaces. They occur, for example, in the imagery, dialogue, and staging of Shakespeare's poems and plays, which were probably acted out beneath and in front of them. Painted cloths were also adapted to public and urban spaces for state pageantry, for banners and flags, for heraldic displays and succession day tilts, and for civic and ecclesiastical purposes.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Terminology
- Technique
- Painted cloths across history and cultures
- Frequency and distribution
- Imagery and subject matter
- Painted cloths in the theater
- Surviving examples
- Later history

61. TRIUMPHAL ENTRIES

Elizabeth Goldring, University of Warwick, United Kingdom, and Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Aberystwyth University, United Kingdom

Triumphal entries, also known simply as “triumphs” or “entries,” were ubiquitous in medieval and early modern Europe. Conventions varied, but, broadly speaking, a triumphal entry was a formal, peaceful entry into a city by its ruler or his representative. The entry encompassed ceremonies designed to highlight the reciprocal relationship between ruler and ruled, such as the exchange of gifts and/or the presentation of the keys to the city; a procession through the city, often culminating at the cathedral; and banquets, entertainments, and other festivities – including, from the late fourteenth century onward, street pageants along the processional route.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Ancient roots
- The triumph in Shakespeare's England
- The influence of Continental triumphs
- Triumphal entries in Shakespeare's plays

62. COLLECTING

Marjorie Swann, Hendrix College, United States

Collecting things developed into an important cultural practice in early modern England. During the Stuart era, collections of art and antiquities became vital components of aristocratic display. Lower on the social ladder, people assembled multifarious collections of rarities. In 1599, the Swiss traveler Thomas Platter visited the London home of Walter Cope and was enthralled by the contents of one room that was “stuffed with queer foreign objects in every corner.” Among the curiosities of London that Platter also sought out was a performance of *Julius Caesar* at the newly built Globe.

TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER INCLUDE

- Collecting as consumption
- Collections of antiquities
- Art collecting
- The Earl of Arundel's collections
- Prince Henry's collections
- The collections of Somerset and Buckingham
- Charles I as connoisseur
- Collections of curiosities